

FOWL FEATHERED

★REVIEW★



No 264

FOWL
FEATHERED
REVIEW
AEROSTATIC DOSSIER // Δ-77.31(B) / KNOCK
INDEX ∴ 4:13:4∞
Drifted as Utility Residue, Declared Sufficient
About the Asked (Collected Under Practice Conditions)

The FFR is no longer to be understood as a journal, nor as any prior category such as "Necrosign." It is instead a distributed production practice: a gathering-method for the generation, capture, and long-duration storage of emergent artifacts arising between human habit and mechanical repetition.

For ease of handling, we describe it as a shared frequency—commonly misidentified as the idle-pattern of a small automobile (late 20th-century compact class) standing in a parking lot at approximately 03:00—but this is merely the audible index-layer.

In its working state, the Assemblage conducts continuous retrieval from verifiable material domains: instruction sheets, retail surfaces, transit markings, service logs, and other document-objects of daily use. These are not preserved intact. They are subjected to pressure, displacement, and reclassification.

We do not curate in the modern sense. We maintain instead an Offenrückraum (open-back space), in which items may enter, settle, or misfile themselves.

Participants (hereafter: "important locals") are those who exhibit Dauerträchtigkeit—a useful persistence under minor strain. Fragility is not prohibited, but it is structurally unsupported.

Any submission that appears to strive toward "Art" in the self-declarative sense will be reassigned to a more stable function (e.g., table-leveling, draft-blocking, oil-absorption).
On the Operation of Source-Engines (Always in Partial Motion)

WARENREGISTERBRUCH (ARCADE INDEX CONDITION)

Fragments are extracted from catalogs, labels, packaging, and signage. Context is removed. Adjacency is reassigned. Authority increases in proportion to specificity, regardless of accuracy.

PROTOKOLLHäUFIGUNG (DOSSIER STACK CONDITION)

Records accumulate: maintenance notes, claims, timestamps. Gaps are preserved. Contradictions are not resolved. A sequence may appear, but closure is considered a filing error.

RANDBEMERKUNGSDRIFT (FALSE COMMENTATOR CONDITION)

Functional texts (manuals, glossaries, guides) are annotated beyond their tolerance. Explanations become misaligned. Confidence is retained.

ANWEISUNGSSCHNITT (CUT-UP RECORDER CONDITION)

Instruction-language is segmented and recombined. Repetition introduces rhythm. Meaning is reduced until only procedure-residue remains.

All outputs must retain Rückverfolgbarkeit (trace-feel): the impression that the fragment could be located again in some drawer, binder, or glove compartment.

Where this condition fails, the material is considered decorative and is removed.

A recurring sonic marker—transcribed provisionally as "dor"—is permitted to enter any layer. Its function remains under study.

ON REPURPOSING (IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION)

All submitted materials enter a Weiterverwendungskreis (cycle of further use). Possible outcomes include:

Inclusion as fragment within a larger construct

Mislabeling and redistribution

Use as structural support (physical or textual)

Reduction to residue for future recombination

Authors retain attribution only in the lowest archival sense. Function supersedes origin.

The current operational formula is recorded as:

$$[(DOR \times 7)^2 + 11B] \div \Sigma(\text{Loose Matter})$$

$$= 0.004 \text{ Useful Units}$$

Verification remains impossible due to kettle interference and unresolved parking-lot acoustics.

Delivery

Materials may be delivered, transmitted, or misplaced.

Retrieval is opportunistic. Loss is considered a form of delayed submission.

LISTEN – OBSERVE

MISFILE – REPEAT

BE USEFUL

STAY LOOSE

NO LIMITS

NO END

THE STAFF (SINK-CUSTODIANS / FUNCTION-BEARERS)

Virgil Kay: Final Arbiter. Currently engaged in the classification of falling bakery items under aerodynamic variance. Maintains decision authority, though criteria are mobile.

Silent Bill: Overseer of Tactical Non-Sequiturs. Executes Satzabbruchhandlung (sentence-break action) by leaving mid-utterance. This is considered a valid editorial intervention.

Unkie Bob: Assigned to Casual Entropy. No longer dismantles structures directly; instead applies insufficient fastening (Lockerbefestigung), allowing failure to emerge without announcement.

The Unnamed Dishwasher: Not recorded in official listings. Present regardless. Performs continuous surface-

restoration under high focus. Functions as Kerntriebwerk
(core engine). Prolonged observation is discouraged.

"NON IGNARA MALI, MISERIS SUCCERRERE
DISCO."
— VIRGIL

V Edición

Upsala College
Library
East Orange, N.J.



Fowl Feathered Review

TREASURY CYCLE • BANGOR CONTINUUM OFFICE • ISSUE 00

REGISTRY OF MORTALITY & MOBILITY

Eternal Ledger / Nothing Occurs Once

CITY OF BANGOR
TREASURY OFFICE

ALL TIMES • ALL VERSIONS
ALL STREETS • ALL LAYERS

DOCKET NO.

1911.1964.2026.



BANGOR, MAINE
All Eras Simultaneous



COMPILED SIMULTANEOUSLY BY THREE CLERKS OF TIME & CITY



VINCENT
OF BEAUVAIS
TEMPORAL INDEX CLERK
OF BANGOR



Author of the *Mirror
of the World* (and
Municipal Supplements)



JACOBUS
DE VORAGINE
RETYLER OF LIVING
SAINTS & ONGOING EVENTS



Compiler of the Golden
Legend (and Sidewalk
Hagiographies)



RASHID AL-DIN
HAMADANI
NONLINEAR CENSUS
AUTHORITY OF BANGOR



Historian of Worlds
(and Their Overlapping
Municipalities)

ALL ENTRIES CO-SIGNED UNDER THE DOCTRINE: NOTHING HERE OCCURS ONCE



ON THE STATUS OF THE SUBJECT
(WHO IS ALSO ALREADY FILED ELSEWHERE)

The subject enters City Hall, but also does not enter City Hall.

In one register, they are present.
In another, they are still approaching.
In a third, they have already left and are being
reviewed for motion compliance.

They declare:

"Temporary in essence, ambulatory in function."

VINCENT:
All functions are
temporary. Essence
is an indexing error.

JACOBUS:
The walker is
always canonized
mid-step.

RASHID:
This person exists
in at least three
municipal centuries
simultaneously.



ENTITIES THAT OCCUR OUTSIDE TIME
BUT INSIDE RECORD



PAUL BUNYAN
(SCALE ANOMALY WITNESS
ACROSS MUNICIPAL LAYERS)

Appears in doorway, simultaneously
too large for building and perfectly
scaled for it.



KENDUSKEAG SASQUATCH
(HYPOLOGICAL CONTINUITY
OBSERVER)

Waits without waiting; is always
already leaving. Witnesses every
flood at once.



THE CREAMSICLE FREEZER
OF OUTER BANGOR LOT
(PERPETUAL COLD OBJECT)

Contains identical creamsicles
in every recorded year.
Temperature does not change;
only interpretation does.



REGISTRY OF MORTALITY
(MORTALITY AS DISTRIBUTED FILE)

Mortality is not recorded as an event.

It is filed as a recurring document with multiple timestamps.

- the subject is dead in 1914 (Opera House fire record layer)
- alive in 1964 (Urban Renewal testimony layer)
- unverified but walking in 2026 (current pedestrian index layer)
- and absent in a version of Bangor that has already
been replaced by parking infrastructure

JACOBUS:
Sainthood is what
happens when death
forgets which version
it belongs to.

VINCENT:
Death is not an
endpoint; it is a
cross-reference.

RASHID:
Mortality is a
disagreement
between archives.



REGISTRY OF MOBILITY
(MOTION AS NON-LINEAR PERMISSION)

The footwear apparatus is inspected across multiple timelines:

- in one: it is shoes
- in another: it is wheels
- in another: it is evidence of municipal optimism
- in another: it has never been assembled
but is still approved

When activated, it produces motion that does not relocate
the subject so much as updates their position in different
versions of the same street.

VINCENT:
Movement is
editorial revision
applied to space.

JACOBUS:
The street blesses
those who pass
through its
alternate drafts.

RASHID:
Travel is what
happens when
cities disagree
with themselves.



THE CITY HALL AS STACKED TIME OBJECT

The Treasury Office is observed as:

- a room that exists in 1911 (fire memory layer)
- 1964 (planning abstraction layer)
- 1997 (restoration impulse layer)
- 2026 (current fluorescent administrative layer)
- and an unbuilt future where it is a parking lot
remembering itself as a building

Walls contain:

- scroll fragments that have not yet been written
- newspaper clippings reporting future loss
- maps that disagree politely with each other
stamps that remember being used differently

A CHANT MOVES
THROUGH ALL LAYERS
AT ONCE:

ALL PERMITS
ARE CONTINUOUS
ALL STREETS
ARE SIMULTANEOUS

ALL WALKING
IS REVISING



QUESTIONS THAT CANNOT BE ANSWERED
BECAUSE THEY ARE STILL OCCURRING

1. Is the subject entering City Hall, or has City Hall entered the subject?
2. If a building burns in one layer but is restored in another, which version requires permits?
3. Do wheels move a person, or move the street under them?
4. Who signs a document that has already been signed in a different century?
5. Is the creamsicle freezer a place, a memory, or a recurring municipal exception?
6. When Paul Bunyan leaves, does he exit or simply change scale context?
7. Does the Sasquatch require a tax category or a new ontology?



1911: THE GREAT FIRE



1914: OPERA HOUSE BURNS



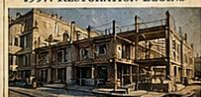
1920: REBUILT IN STYLE



1964: URBAN RENEWAL VOTE



1997: RESTORATION BEGINS



2026: JANE'S WALKS



What's not there and
what could be.

ALL THINGS
TEMPORARY
ALL THE TIME

THIS DOCUMENT EXISTS
IN ALL ITS DATES
AT ONCE



SUBJECT RELEASED
INTO CONTINUOUS
SIDEWALK STATUS

CITY OF BANGOR
CONTINUES SELF-REVISION



FINAL ENTRY (NON-TERMINAL)

NOTHING IS FILED ONCE
NOTHING IS OVER
NOTHING IS BEFORE OR AFTER WITHOUT PERMISSION

VIRGIL KAY

EDITOR ROOSTER CHINA WOK HABITUE
TREASURY CLERK & STAMPER OF
CONDITIONAL TRUE THINGS

Virgil Kay



樹
街

TREE
STREETS

THE TREE STREETS ARE A FOREST



A PROCLAMATION FOR WANDERERS, RECORD KEEPERS, AND THOSE
WHO LIVE BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE LEDGER.



I. FEUILLETON - WALKING NOTES



The butcher's child plays where 129 once stood.
Political spoils fill the hollow.
Pirates move with pockets full of war—
food, equipment, the alkaline taste of seizure.
Their gear: limited, yet vast.
We have built bodies with machines since 1996.
Gold coins buy time against fence-thieves.
Historians manufacture truth for their patrons.
In the heart: only pirates.

Some roots touch.
Some do not.

228 horns. 51 souls. 13 machines.

In the trash and among the debris, cigarette butts,
animal carcasses, dividers, office furniture,
language textbooks, wedding dresses, and even a toilet.
These Norwegian experiments provide shocking evidence.
The sea edits, processes, and mixes.
You can still hear it—waves, wind, gulls,
the backup beep of a truck, sometimes a voice.
And then, out of nowhere,
a neon-lit, futuristic jukebox starts playing.

Cables, barrels, old fishing nets.
Waste becomes sand. Sand becomes crust.
The seed vault is a few kilometers away,
guarding the future while we bury the present.
Cleanup comes. Waste returns.
Who is responsible? All of us. None of us.
Art does not answer. Art asks.
The brush keeps moving.
Even after the shutter clicks.

海
盜
之
心



II. MIKROGRAM - THE DECISIVE MOMENT

A child kicks a bottle.
A pirate counts it.
A historian footnotes it.
The wave erases everyone—
then leaves the receipt.



TREE STREETS MUNICIPAL RECEIPT	
No.	129
DATE	bitter gourd year
HNS.	51
SOULS.	51
MACH.	13
PAID	How...



III. DRAMOLETTE - A SMALL THEATER

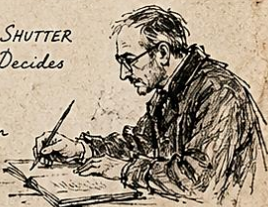
Pirate:
In my heart, only pirates.
Historian:
In my ledger, only facts.
Pirate:
Then we are both liars.
Historian:
Then we are both truth-tellers.



BRUSH
Drifts

SHUTTER
Decides

The world
is larger than
either.



WALKS.
WRITES.
WAITS.
CLICKS.

PIRATES' HALL,
YEAR OF THE BITTER GOULD.
Printed on aged paper,
found between pages
of a forgotten ledger.

FOUND:
Between page 98
and page 130.
Drawer 7, North Ward.



SEA.
SALT.
SILENCE.
SIGNAL.

The Shell Contains No Green

By Saul Holloway

The Japanese beetle carries no green.

It carries the labor of green, the bent light of a shell persuading the eye to invent pigment where none has gathered. The mistake belongs neither to the insect nor to the garden but to the old appetite for believing that brilliance must have a substance hidden beneath it, some powdered mineral or crushed blossom waiting to stain the fingers. The shell refuses that bargain. It shines by refusing to possess the color it spends.

The piano remembers in the same counterfeit way. Not wood remembering a tree, nor felt remembering a sheep, but arithmetic rehearsing the rumor of resonance until a room agrees to call the rumor a piano. Donna Summer steps into that agreement as though entering sunlight

that has forgotten the sun. Every sustained vowel leans against machinery trying with almost devotional seriousness to remember what breathing once sounded like.

Elsewhere a violin lifts a phrase already older than itself. A piano answers. Later, almost as an afterthought, a slide guitar arrives with dust on its sleeves, bending the air rather than the note.

Tiny Tim is suddenly nowhere that history expected him to stand. Not vaudeville. Not parody. Not nostalgia. A recital room whose windows overlook a country road that has not yet decided which decade deserves its gravel.

The horse waits before the ambulance can become an ambulance. Leather draws the future by the shoulders while the hospital rehearses the grammar of urgency with nineteenth-century lungs. Motion is already modern. Velocity has not yet been persuaded. Somewhere a telephone refuses to answer quickly enough. Somewhere a stable door performs administration better than mercy.

Jeremiah presses damp clay that remembers both vessel and collapse. The wheel turns. The hand hesitates. A ruined shape does not argue against being remade; it merely keeps the pressure of the first thumbprint somewhere beneath the second. The bucket beside the roses fills quietly. Soap becomes a temporary weather. Japanese beetles strike the surface like punctuation too heavy for the sentence that invited it.

Three explanations arrive wearing polished shoes.

History clears its throat and inventories climates, trade routes, migration, circuitry, agricultural extension bulletins, studio equipment, horseflesh, municipal procurement, spectral acoustics, devotional intention, optical interference. Absence smiles thinly and removes the nouns one after another until only the pressure between them remains. Then grief says only Bangor, and the room becomes embarrassingly ordinary.

No. No, you catalog-clattering causalmongers,
you shelldazzle shucksters and syntax-starvers,
you footnote-ferrets stuffing paper lungs with
tidy inevitabilities while the beetle flashes a
color it refuses to own and the DX-seven-and-
seven sins another polished almost-piano into
the shopping-mall nave. Mallarmumble!
Tainetrain! Werfelwail! Glossolalollygag! You
rivet the ambulance to the bibliography, grease
the horse with metadata, alphabetize the
silence, and still the wheel comes loose on
Harlow Street because somebody believed
another explanatory paragraph could tighten the
axle. Pigmentless green, pianoless piano,
ghostgospel slide, beetlebabel, shellspell,
brightbluff, inkstink, wordwork wormwood—
curse the splendid contraption and the fool who
wired four quarrels into one throat expecting a
single honest sentence to survive.

A bucket.

Dish soap.

The beetles drift without giving up their light.

The roses keep losing leaves they never agreed
to spare.

Far away a singer holds one note longer than the
machine beneath her can explain, while another
voice follows a violin into a room whose century
cannot quite settle around it. The horse lowers
its head before moving. The wheel turns once
more beneath the potter's hands. Nothing has
become symbolic enough to stop being itself.

The shell still contains no green.

The eye continues manufacturing it.

That work remains unfinished.

THE FETCH PROTOCOL



THE FETCH PROTO L
or: The Practical Pharmacology of
Personal Atmosphere

Being a Treatise on Scent, Ledgers,
Municipal Violence, and the Uses of a
Grotesque Body

By Marginalized Carl

0. NEGATIVE

The city does not sleep.

That is a sentimental lie told by men who have
never listened to brick at four in the morning.

Bangor breathes in ledgers.

It exhales vapor rub, river fog, paper-mill lime,
wet wool, tuberose.

It dreams through walls that have been moved six
feet to the left and forgotten by every map except
the one underneath the pharmacy counter.

The visible street is not the organism.

The visible street is the fruiting body.

Under it:

rails,

mill gears,

municipal obligations,

buried invoices,

pharmacy scales used as counterweights,

signed forms,

unsigned forms,

forms signed by dead men,

forms signed for dead men,

forms no one remembers signing but everyone
continues to obey.

At the center of this civic respiration stands the
Exchange Street Apothecary.

At the center of the apothecary stands Wendell
Fetch.

Thirty-seven. Pharmacist. Grotesque.

Face like a celeriac root dragged from frozen
Penobscot silt. Eyes like a monkfish brought up

from a trench where light had been abolished by committee.

A man people remember before they know why.

A man who smells like a tropical funeral.

A man who has made himself impossible to ignore and therefore impossible to read.

1. THE MORNING IS A MACHINE

The humidity gauge above the digitalis shelf reads forty-seven percent.

No: sixty-two.

No: forty-nine.

The number changes depending on who is remembering it.

Wendell knows the true number.

Elias, nineteen days into his apprenticeship, does not.

This is how apprenticeship begins: not with knowledge, but with the humiliation of discovering that what you noticed was not the important part.

At 6:30 AM, before the city has fully committed to being visible, Wendell stands before the copper sink in the back of the pharmacy and performs the Fetch Protocol.

Not habit.

Fortification.

Declaration of hostilities against entropy.

A private liturgy built from chemical facts.

FIRST: THE HUMIDITY

He taps the gauge twice with a fingernail faintly yellowed by nitric acid.

Too dry, and the air becomes a thief: it steals moisture from elderly lungs, curls prescription labels, loosens the glue on old invoices.

Too damp, and Bangor sweats its sins into the plaster.

Forty-seven percent is not comfort.

It is civic respiration held briefly in balance.

SECOND: THE CHARCOAL

He unlatches the air purifier.

The activated charcoal filter comes out gray at the edges, darkened by a day's worth of breath, perfume, cough, wool, river fog, talc, panic.

The old filters are not discarded.

They are dated.

Archived.

Stacked in paper sleeves in the basement beneath the laxatives, as if one day a tribunal may subpoena the air.

Elias once asked why.

Wendell answered:

“Because the body testifies even when the mouth is employed elsewhere.”

THIRD: THE TUBEROSE

A blue glass phial.

Brixton Tuberose Pure Perfume Oil – 1891
Formula.

Three drops.

One on the left wrist.

One on the right wrist.

One at the base of the throat.

He does not rub them together.

Rubbing vulgarizes the molecule.

The scent rises slowly. Heavy. Narcotic. Floral only in the way a cathedral is a pile of stone.

Tuberose has confidence.

Tuberose does not ask permission to occupy a room.

FOURTH: THE VAPOR RUB

A dab beneath the nose.

Camphor cutting through tuberose like a cold blade through silk.

Beauty, interrupted by medicine.

Medicine, interrupted by death.

Death, interrupted by mint.

FIFTH: THE CUFFS

Seventeen inches.

Purple.

Ruffled.

Detachable.

Absurd.

Armor.

He secures them with silver studs shaped like poppy heads.

He straightens them until each fold falls in disciplined disorder.

“A professional,” Wendell says, “must maintain options.”

Elias stands in the doorway holding two coffees.

Black for Wendell.

Milk and sugar for himself, because he has not yet suffered enough to drink coffee as punishment.

“Fragrance without preparation,” Wendell says, “is merely decoration. Preparation without fragrance is merely survival.”

The sentence hangs in the purified air.

Not wisdom.

Protocol.

Load-bearing speech.

Elias asks, because he is young and still believes reasons precede behavior:

“You ever think about why you do this?”

Wendell takes the coffee without looking at him.

“Because it works.”

2. TWO RECORDS

In the back room, on an old dual-turntable console balanced atop an overturned crate of cod-liver oil bottles, two records wait.

Left platter:

Van Cliburn, Moscow, 1958. Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Brass chords like steel doors opening onto history. The sound of a young man trying to become larger than the room assigned to him.

Right platter:

Jerry Burke at the Hammond organ. Domestic voltage. Low-wattage continuity. Plastic slipcovers. Coffee percolating. A kitchen clock. Somebody's wife humming while rinsing cups.

Wendell never blends them.

He cuts.

Concerto for weighing powder.

Organ for typing labels.

Concerto for aspiration.

Organ for endurance.

Concerto says: I will be remembered.

Organ says: I was here.

The pharmacy requires both.

3. SIDE-DESK

At 9:47 AM, the brass bell above the oak door chimes.

A punctuation mark in the sentence of the morning.

Mrs. Gable enters.

She does not go to the counter where the blood pressure cuff hangs.

She does not look at the cough syrups.

She does not pretend this is about knees, pills,
age, weather, or the polite decay of the body.

She walks to the side-desk.

The side-desk is small, wooden, half-hidden
behind the prescription pickup area.

Blood pressure medication is for the counter.

The side-desk is for envelopes, seals, powders,
coded ledgers, missing sons, and the kind of
requests that make air thicken.

Mrs. Gable's winter coat smells of wet cellar wool
and stove ash.

Her gloved hands clamp around a black vinyl
handbag as if the clasp is the last lawful thing in
Bangor.

She leans close enough to enter Wendell's
atmosphere.

She says:

"If the seal is broken, don't touch the powder;
just walk back to the car and call me from a
payphone."

The sentence is older than the morning.

A password.

A prayer.

A wound rehearsed until it becomes grammar.

Wendell does not blink.

“Corliss?”

“They took him at four,” Mrs. Gable says. “St. Jude’s Riverine. Voluntary psychiatric hold.”

“Voluntary,” Elias repeats.

Mrs. Gable looks at him then. Not unkindly.

The look says: You are still young enough to believe words are attached to meanings by law.

She slides an envelope across the desk.

Inside: a photograph of Corliss Gable through a clinic window. Bruised cheek. Bare feet. Archivist’s hands. Eyes of a man who has seen the gears behind the wall and understood too late that the gears also see him.

“He had fragments,” Mrs. Gable says. “From the old water district audit. Prescription routing. 1994. Chloral hydrate. Pethidine. Ward stock that

never reached the wards. Names. Dates. But the page numbers don't match the books."

Wendell says nothing.

Mrs. Gable says:

"He said you had the index."

Under the register is a locked drawer.

Inside the drawer is a heavy leather-bound notebook.

On its cover, stamped in fading gilt:

THE PRACTICAL PHARMACOLOGY OF
PERSONAL ATMOSPHERE

Wendell places one purple-ruffled hand on the drawer.

He does not open it.

Not yet.

Elias notices the hand.

He notices the drawer.

He notices Mrs. Gable noticing both.

He does not yet know that noticing is not reading.

Wendell asks:

“Was the seal broken?”

Mrs. Gable shakes her head.

“No.”

Wendell exhales through the menthol line under his nose.

“Then he is still alive.”

4. COUNTER / SIDE-DESK

The pharmacy is not a pharmacy.

Or rather: it is absolutely a pharmacy, which is worse.

The shelves are alphabetized.

Aspirin.

Atropine.

Bismuth.

Camphor.

Digitalis.

Epsom salts.

Everything aligned.

Everything labeled.

Everything in its place.

And because everything is in its place, absence becomes legible.

A bottle shifted one inch left means: someone came looking.

A gap in cough syrup means: danger.

Peppermint lozenges moved from third shelf to second means: Mrs. Hargrove saw men near the clinic.

The pharmacy is a language.

Wendell is its only fluent speaker.

Elias, assistant-apprentice, stock boy, witness-in-training, is learning nouns.

The regulars understand enough to survive.

The strangers flinch at Wendell's face.

Some linger.

Some stare.

Some ask loudly for antacids while their eyes search the back shelves.

Wendell remembers them all.

Who switched blood pressure medications.

Whose child cannot swallow tablets.

Whose husband died.

Who is ashamed to ask for antifungal cream.

Who needs a bottle but really came in because no one has touched their hand in three weeks.

“Why do they trust you?” Elias asks.

Wendell adjusts a bottle of tuberose oil.

“Because I remember them.”

Then, after a pause:

“And because I smell like a funeral.”

5. THE INDEX

That night after closing, with Cliburn on the left platter and Burke on the right, Wendell opens the notebook for the first time in front of Elias.

No thunder.

No confession music.

Only the needle hiss.

Only the air purifier.

Only the city moving faintly beneath the floor.

The pages are yellowed and ruled like an apothecary ledger. Iron-gall ink. Precise columns.

Each entry appears, at first glance, to be perfume criticism written by a pharmacist with theological injuries.

PEPPERMINT

Useful, but associated with candy.

Volatile. Bright. Disarming.

Too minor to frighten auditors.

Too sweet to prosecute.

Wendell taps the line.

“Dr. Harold Pepin,” he says. “Health Commissioner. The newspapers called him Dr. Peppermint because he handed lozenges to children at parades. Diverted controlled stock

through sanitary mouthwash contracts. Nobody audits candy."

Next entry.

CAMPHOR

Authoritative, but risks suggesting illness.

The scent of the sickroom pretending to be the cure.

"Judge Arthur Camforth," Wendell says. "Approved emergency closures. Killed inquiries before they acquired names. Smelled of authority. Authority often smells medicinal because it is treating the wound it made."

Next.

TUBEROSE

A flower with the confidence of a cathedral.

Expensive. White. Heavy.

Persists through rot.

Best used by institutions that mistake endurance for innocence.

“Mayor Elihu Tuber,” Wendell says. “Not Tuberose. Tuber. The flower is the key, not the name. Never trust resemblance. Trust structure.”

Elias leans over the page.

“What structure?”

“The five steps.”

Humidity.

Charcoal.

Tuberose.

Camphor.

Cuffs.

Wendell turns the notebook ninety degrees.

Suddenly the entries become columns.

Climate control. Filtration. Masking. Medical authority. Public spectacle.

“First,” Wendell says, “they altered the environment. City contracts, clinic classifications, emergency procurement rules. Humidity.”

His finger moves.

“Second, they filtered the stock. Drugs disappeared into orphanages, municipal wards, water district accounts. Charcoal.”

Finger.

“Third, they covered the smell with dignity. Foundations, trustees, preservation boards. Tuberose.”

Finger.

“Fourth, they gave it medical authority. Judges, health commissioners, clinic holds. Camphor.”

Finger.

“Fifth, they made the visible thing ridiculous so no one would examine it. Cuffs.”

Elias looks at Wendell’s wrists.

Wendell sees him looking.

“Yes,” he says.

The page turns.

BITTER ALMONDS & WET WOOL

Subject: Francis Fetch. Licensed Pharmacist.

Revoked 1994.

Mechanism: framed for chloral hydrate deficit.
Signed confession to protect dependent minor.
Died of pleurisy in municipal ward basement.

Atmosphere: the smell of papers being signed by
men who do not intend to remain in the room.

“My father,” Wendell says.

The organ record crackles.

The concerto waits.

Elias says:

“You knew.”

“I knew,” Wendell says. “Knowing is not
proving.”

“Why keep it hidden?”

Wendell closes the notebook.

The sound is small.

Final.

Coffin lid. Register drawer. Court stamp.

“Because everyone asked what I smelled like,” he
says. “No one asked what I knew.”

6. EXIT THROUGH THE CITY'S THROAT

Morning.

The Protocol again.

Humidity.

Charcoal.

Tuberose.

Vapor rub.

Cuffs.

Mrs. Gable's envelope in Wendell's inside pocket.

Notebook against his ribs.

Elias locking the front door.

"Leave the organ record running," Wendell says.

"The wholesale rep comes at ten."

"The wholesale rep deals in chemical tonnage.
We are going to examine a subtraction."

They step into Bangor's gray streets.

The city arranges itself as if innocent.

Brick façades.

Fire escapes.

Granite curbs.

Traffic lights blinking in river fog.

An old woman with a paper bag of onions.

A boy on a bicycle.

A man smoking outside a closed barber shop.

Normality, that most successful form of concealment.

At the corner: two men in charcoal suits beside a slate-gray Dodge.

Not police.

Not thugs.

Worse.

Institutional cleaners.

They do not chase.

They audit.

One holds a leather document tube.

The other holds nothing, which is always more frightening.

“They’re watching Mrs. Gable,” Elias says.

“They are auditing Mrs. Gable,” Wendell says.

“There is a difference. Watching implies curiosity.”

The men do not look at Wendell.

Or rather, they look and dismiss him.

A grotesque pharmacist in purple ruffles is not a threat.

A spectacle is its own curtain.

Wendell turns sharply into the alley behind Exchange Street.

And the city opens its mouth.

7. MECHANISM

The brick façades are not fixed.

That is the first lesson.

The second lesson is that everyone knows this, technically, and no one knows it operationally.

In the 1880s, lumber money paid for rails beneath storefronts so buildings could be moved around mill access, trolley lines, tax boundaries, flood damage, speculative fraud, and the private inconveniences of powerful men.

In the 1970s, urban renewal found the old tracks and used them again.

In the 1990s, the fraud's architects discovered that dull civic history is the best hiding place in the world.

Not catacombs.

Not secret temples.

Infrastructure.

Greased rails under cellar vaults.

Cast-iron columns masking gear shafts.

Library card drawers built into walls as mechanical index boxes.

Old shipyard pulleys.

Paper-mill gears.

Pharmacy scales used as counterweights.

Utility wires tuned like clock springs.

Fire escapes hinged not merely to descend but to sweep laterally across brick like black iron hands measuring a time no clock admits.

The storefronts shift by inches.

Six inches closes an alley.

Twelve opens a service stair.

A façade rotates and the city becomes another version of itself.

No magic.

No flash.

Only weight, rust, water, municipal neglect, and the patience of machines designed by men who thought paperwork would outlive them.

Elias touches a brick wall.

It vibrates.

“It’s still moving,” he says.

“Bangor doesn’t stop,” Wendell says. “It pretends to.”

Behind them, the charcoal suits enter the alley.

Wendell reaches into a wall recess behind a dead electrical junction box. His fingers find a brass lever disguised as a broken latch.

He pulls.

A brick wall groans inward six inches.

The sound: a church bell dragged through gravel.

“Step through,” Wendell says.

They disappear into the city’s throat.

8. STAIRWELL: LESSON IN READING

Darkness.

Steam pipe.

River smell.

A slit of gray sky four stories above.

The suits pass outside, their leather soles clicking against stone where Wendell stood three seconds earlier.

Inside the utility stairwell, Wendell opens the notebook again.

“Look before you hear,” he says.

Elias looks.

The page is not a page.

It is a room with no furniture.

It is a map with no roads.

It is a sentence that refuses to become useful until someone agrees to be changed by it.

Wendell reads:

PEPPERMINT

Useful, but associated with candy.

Then he stops.

“Do not translate too quickly,” he says. “Speed is how auditors win.”

Elias waits.

“Peppermint is not Pepin because the names resemble each other. Resemblance is cheap. Peppermint is Pepin because the function matches. Sweetness. Minor comfort. Public harmlessness. Concealment through triviality.”

He turns the page.

CAMPHOR

Authoritative, but risks suggesting illness.

“Camphor is Camforth because his authority required the smell of cure. He closed investigations as if disinfecting them. The disease used medical language to describe itself as treatment.”

Another page.

TUBEROSE

A flower with the confidence of a cathedral.

“Tuberose is not merely the mayor. It is the trust. The clinic. The preservation board. Anything that uses beauty, age, or dignity to make decay appear ordained.”

Elias says:

“And the cuffs?”

Wendell looks at his wrists.

“The visible absurdity. The thing everyone talks about so they never ask what it protects.”

Then, very softly:

“They made my father ridiculous before they destroyed him. Missing stock. Bad records. Scent

obsession. Unstable. Unsuitable. They wrote him into the public ledger as a joke, and the joke killed him.”

A pause.

Steam hisses.

The city breathes.

Wendell says:

“I improved the joke.”

9. CLINIC

St. Jude’s Riverine sits near the waterfront where the Kenduskeag gives itself to the Penobscot.

Victorian red brick.

Granite quoins.

Mansard roof.

Iron cresting like the teeth of an upside-down harrow.

A clinic, officially.

A holding pen for inconvenient truths, operationally.

A rotating eastern wing, mechanically.

The building rests on an old lumber-mill gear plate sunk into the riverbed. At high tide the wing shifts twelve degrees, moving windows out of alignment with the public path along the embankment.

Patients disappear not by being moved.

The building moves around them.

Wendell enters through the laundry access.

Elias follows.

Mrs. Gable waits inside the service corridor, white-faced, clutching her handbag.

Corliss Gable is upstairs in a windowless office that smells of carbolic soap and cold tea.

He wears an unbuttoned cardigan.

His bare feet are blue against the floorboards.

Four ledger fragments lie on the table before him.

Numbers.

Dates.

Batch codes.

Water district offsets.

Clinic maintenance orders.

Prescription routing.

Meaningless without atmosphere.

“Wendell,” Corliss says. “They’re making me sign discharge papers. If I sign, the fragments stay here as patient property. If I don’t sign, they certify me under the Sane-Code Act.”

“That act expired in 1938,” Elias says.

Corliss laughs once.

Not because it is funny.

Because legality often outlives law.

Wendell sits.

Opens the notebook.

Cross-references.

The room changes.

Not physically.

Worse.

It becomes legible.

Ledger fragment:

W.D. 94-17B / S.M.W. / 40 drums / St. Jude
Maint.

Notebook:

SWEET MOUTH WASH

Peppermint masking. Chloral hydrate moved
through orphan dental program.

Ledger fragment:

C.F. authorization / emergency ward closure /
Judge C.

Notebook:

CAMPBOR FIELD

Legal disinfectant. Used when inquiry requires
killing without appearing murdered.

Ledger fragment:

B.T. 80 lb / preservation gala / river trust.

Notebook:

BRIXTON TUBEROSE

Master cover. Dignity purchase. Fraud wearing flowers.

Corliss begins to cry silently.

The door opens.

Two men in charcoal suits enter.

No guns.

No threat of bodily harm.

A silver pen.

A buckram folder.

Red tabs.

The purest instruments of violence are designed not to stain the hand.

“Mr. Fetch,” says the first man, “this space is restricted under Section Four of the Municipal Trust Agreement.”

The second man looks at Elias.

“Your presence is unbudgeted.”

Wendell closes the notebook.

The sound is a small court order.

The first man continues:

“The ledger fragments are municipal property under the 1994 Consolidation Act. Mrs. Gable’s son may be discharged without entry of mental defect if the documents are surrendered. As for you, Mr. Fetch, your pharmacy license comes before the Health Trustee in January. We would prefer the Exchange Street Apothecary remain open. It is a colorful part of the downtown aesthetic.”

Colorful.

The word lands on Wendell’s cuffs.

Elias feels his knees weaken.

Not from fear of violence.

From the elegance of the trap.

A man can be murdered by paperwork and buried in compliance.

Wendell stands in the center of the room.

Grotesque.

Perfumed.

Ruffled.

Ridiculous.

Necessary.

He removes the notebook from his coat.

He does not hand it to the suits.

He hands it to Elias.

“Read,” Wendell says.

10. READING AS WEAPON

Elias opens the notebook.

His hands shake.

The iron-gall ink does not.

“October 14, 1994,” he reads. “Francis Fetch, pharmacist of record. Diverted stock: forty drums chloral hydrate mislabeled as Sweet Mouth Wash. Consigned to the account of the City Health Trustee, signed by Judge Camforth, counter-signed by St. Jude’s Riverine Maintenance Trust.”

The man with the pen raises one hand.

“This is unverified private narrative. It has no standing—”

“Read,” Wendell says.

Quiet.

Too quiet.

Elias continues.

“Entry: Peppermint. Useful, but associated with candy. Application: public health confectionery program. Mechanism: controlled sedatives routed through dental and orphanage accounts. A sweet scent used to conceal a sour floor.”

The suits shift.

Not much.

Enough.

Mrs. Gable hears it.

Corliss hears it.

The suits hear themselves hearing it.

Elias reads:

“Entry: Camphor. Authoritative, but risks suggesting illness. Application: emergency judicial closure. Mechanism: legal disinfectant.

Inquiry sealed under medical necessity. The cure murders the diagnosis.”

The pen stops moving.

Elias reads:

“Entry: Tuberose. A flower with the confidence of a cathedral. Application: Board of Trustees, St. Jude’s Riverine, Mayor Elihu Tuber, Bangor Preservation Fund. Mechanism: institutional dignity used to out-scent decay.”

The man with the folder says:

“This language is metaphorical.”

Wendell says:

“So is money.”

Silence.

Elias turns the page.

He sees the entry before he understands it.

It is not labeled like the others.

Or it is labeled with all of them.

Tuberose.

Charcoal.

Menthol.

Camphor.

Wet wool.

Bitter almonds.

Cuffs.

A description layered so densely it violates the notebook's own rules.

Elias reads more slowly.

FILTER SUBJECT: W.F.

Installed without permission. Replaced without thanks. Absorbs what the room refuses to name.

Applied at seventeen, basement of municipal ward, 1994. Present when Francis Fetch signed confession under duress. Present when stock ledger was altered. Present when witness was advised to forget.

Not innocent.

Not guilty.

Essential.

The only record never moved.

Elias stops.

Wendell's face gives nothing away.

But his hand trembles once.

Just once.

The city could miss it.

Elias does not.

The suits do not know what to do with a
trembling hand. Their forms have no box for it.

The man with the pen says:

“Mr. Fetch—”

Wendell's voice breaks the room.

“READ.”

Not loud merely.

Old.

The sound of every sealed envelope opening at
once.

“Read the scent-line, boy. Read the names they
hid in soap.”

Elias reads:

“Brixton Tuberosc. Eighty pounds charged to river preservation gala during diphtheria outbreak. Funds drawn from orphan pension reserve. Dry-dock fees paid for mayoral yacht under shell foundation.”

Mrs. Gable says:

“My God.”

Corliss says nothing.

The suits say nothing.

The notebook has crossed from object into speech.

Speech has crossed into testimony.

Testimony has crossed into memory.

Memory cannot be repossessed without making theft visible.

The man with the folder tries one final door.

“You believe this changes anything?”

Wendell adjusts his cuffs.

“It changes the audit.”

11. FURY SPARK

Because the machinery is obscene.

Because the whole city has been edited by
cowards with clean cuffs and dirty pens.

Because a man can be turned into a smell, a father
into a deficit, a son into a voluntary patient, a
pharmacy into local color, a ledger into weather,
a crime into preservation, a clinic into care, a
bribe into maintenance, a sedative into
mouthwash, a confession into civic tidiness.

Because the brick moves and everyone pretends
brick does not move.

Because the page says W.F. and the boy reading
it is not a boy anymore.

Because the suits have faces like invoices and
hearts like filing cabinets and still–still–their
shoes are polished.

Because language itself is implicated:
peppermint, camphor, tuberose, all those pretty
names dragged through the municipal sewer and
taught to curtsy before the trustees.

Because the grotesque pharmacist with his ruffles and vapor rub has been carrying the city's unburied father under his sternum for twenty years while customers asked if he had anything for a cough.

Because the whole damned contraption of evidence, scent, brick, clock, grief, comedy, medicine, and rot should collapse under its own cleverness but does not, because underneath the pavement the roots touch exactly where they must and nowhere else.

Because no metaphor is innocent once it has been used on an invoice.

Bangor.

Plain.

Cold.

The name lands like a pill in a dry mouth.

The room stops ornamenting itself.

Wendell says:

"If Elias leaves this building, he goes to Augusta. He brings no notebook. He brings memory. He will tell them what Tuberose means on a

municipal invoice. Would you like to explain why the water district purchased eighty pounds of perfume oil during a public health emergency?"

The suits retreat.

Not defeated.

Stalled.

Procedurally.

They close the buckram folder.

The pen retracts.

A tiny click.

"The discharge papers for Mr. Cable," says the man with the pen, "will be filed under Routine Administrative Error. He may collect his shoes from the orderly."

They leave.

Their leather soles tick down the corridor like small clocks dying politely.

12. RETURN

They walk back through the clockwork alleys in noon fog.

Corliss wears boots without laces.

Mrs. Gable holds his arm.

Elias carries the notebook against his ribs.

Wendell says nothing for seven blocks.

The fire escapes sweep shadows across brick.

A façade settles back into place behind them.

The city resumes its false innocence.

At the Exchange Street Apothecary, the brass
bell chimes.

Inside, the Jerry Burke organ record has reached
the inner groove.

Shhh-click.

Shhh-click.

Shhh-click.

Continuity.

Not triumph.

Continuity.

Wendell hangs his coat on the brass peg.

Looks at the copper sink.

“Elias.”

“Yes, Mr. Fetch?”

“The hygrometer.”

Elias looks.

“Sixty-six percent.”

“Too damp. Replace the charcoal. The digitalis will clump.”

Elias replaces the filter.

This time he dates the old one.

His handwriting is clumsy.

It will improve.

Wendell uncorks the blue phial.

Three drops.

Wrists.

Throat.

Vapor rub beneath the nose.

Cuffs straightened.

The Protocol continues exactly as before.

Except nothing is exactly as before.

Elias now understands that the grotesque was never decoration.

The scent was never vanity.

The cuffs were never costume.

The ritual was a technology of survival, a discipline built around a wound, a method for keeping one record immovable in a city designed to move records out of sight.

Wendell slides The Practical Pharmacology of Personal Atmosphere into the drawer beneath the register.

Locks it.

Turns the sign from CLOSED to OPEN.

The first customer of the afternoon enters for blood pressure medication.

Wendell knows her name.

He knows she prefers the smaller tablets.

He knows her husband died in April.

He does not mention the clinic.

He does not mention the suits.

He does not mention his father.

He says:

“Mrs. Hargrove. You’ll want water with these.”

She looks relieved before she knows why.

13. YEARS LATER / ROOT SYSTEM

Years later, after the municipal trust dissolves into state hearings, sealed settlements, missing minutes, and one federal report that no one reads past page twelve—

Years later, after St. Jude’s Riverine becomes luxury offices with exposed brick and a plaque honoring Bangor’s medical heritage—

Years later, after the old movable storefronts are welded permanently to their iron footings by a contractor who does not know what he is immobilizing—

Years later, after Corliss Gable teaches archival ethics at a community college and still removes his shoes whenever he feels trapped—

Years later, after Elias inherits the pharmacy drawer key but not the cuffs—

People in Bangor do not say:

“Remember the pharmacist who smelled strange?”

They say:

“Remember Wendell Fetch? The fellow in the purple ruffles who knew exactly what medicine your mother needed before you explained why you came in?”

And someone always adds:

“The place smelled like a tropical funeral, but somehow you trusted him.”

Then someone else:

“And it turned out you were right to.”

The city moves on tracks no one sees.

The archive is not a warehouse.

The archive is a neighborhood.

The neighborhood is not a plan.

The neighborhood is a forest.

Some roots touch.

Some do not.

The filter remembers everything the air forgot.

And every morning, for as long as Wendell Fetch
is able to stand before the copper sink, the ritual
begins again:

Humidity.

Charcoal.

Tuberose.

Camphor.

Cuffs.

Not innocence.

Not victory.

Protocol.



THE BUZZ

a Tree Streets story

By Hermann Psychodiagnostik



1.

The fluorescent lights of the Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center didn't hum. They buzzed – a thousand hornets trapped behind frosted plastic, working out some grievance against the wiring.

Arthur sat on the plastic-covered mattress and unfolded the printout for the ninth time that hour. The paper had gone soft as cloth. He'd read it so many times the creases knew where to fall before his fingers did.

THE ULTIMATE RESET: How a 72-Hour Hold Makes Your Debt Uncollectible.

Underneath the title, a cartoon eagle wore sunglasses and held a shredded credit card. Fourteen thousand upvotes. Arthur had counted them like a rosary.

He wasn't afraid of being here. He was early for something good, the way you're early for a flight you're excited about, checking the departures board every four minutes even though the numbers can't change that fast.



2.

Every staff member who passed his door got auditioned. *Billing? Legal? Financial Services?* None of them were. They were just nurses, carrying blood pressure cuffs and small paper cups.

Arthur didn't mind. He was running the numbers in his head, and the numbers were gorgeous.

Somewhere, right now, he told himself:

Chase, freezing. A collections floor in Ohio, quietly relabeling his file DECEASED (ADMIN). A database blinking once, like a held breath, and letting go. His student loan servicer's mascot – a cartoon owl named Scholar Steve – taking off its little graduation cap in respect.

He rehearsed the words like a man tuning a guitar he'd never played.

"Lack of capacity."

"Contracts signed while mentally incompetent."

"They can't legally enforce that."

The phrases were beautiful and load-bearing and made of nothing, three joists resting on air, and Arthur stood on them like a man who has never once fallen through a floor and so no longer believes floors can be fallen through.



3.

He finally flagged down an aide and asked, with the calm of a man requesting his hotel checkout time, to speak to "whoever handles financial discharge."

Twenty minutes later, Brenda came in.

No clipboard theatrics. No sigh. Just a woman in her fifties with the specific gravity of someone who has had this exact conversation, or one shaped exactly like it, more times than she could bill for.

Arthur smiled like a man about to be handed a diploma.

"I'm ready to sign the paperwork. The big reset button. The one that makes the eagle in sunglasses wave a magic shredded card and poof – debt gone like last week's ham sandwich."

Brenda didn't sit. "Paperwork. Wallpaper paperwork. Origami paperwork that folds itself

into little paper cranes and flies straight into the shredder. I've got a drawer full of forms nobody's invented yet – capacity waivers, invisible soup coupons, parking meter forgiveness slips, the whole municipal circus."

"The capacity waivers. The legal ones. The ones that call up Chase and say, 'This man's brain took a 72-hour vacation, kindly delete him from capitalism.'"

"Capacity." She said it the way you'd say *dirigible* after it floated away with your left shoe and three suspicious pigeons. "You want waivers like they're scratch-off tickets at the pharmacy. Scratch hard enough and maybe your student loans turn into accordion music. Legal waivers for the cartoon eagle's retirement party? That form doesn't exist. I checked. Same drawer as the one that turns off gravity, the one that makes interest take a nap. Same nothing. Same drawer that's been coughing dust since 1974."

She looked at him the way you look at a parking meter that's asking for correct change in a currency that stopped being minted in 1987.



4.

"Nothing has happened to your credit cards," Brenda said.

Arthur blinked.

"Your banks don't know you're here. Your banks don't know you're alive. Your banks are a fish tank with a phone number and a sad little plastic diver who hasn't moved since the Carter administration. You could set this building on fire, roast marshmallows on the flaming cinderblocks, and Citibank would still send you a statement on the fourteenth."

"But the legal —"

"Contract incapacity." She ticked items on her fingers like she was reading a grocery list to a man drowning in one. "Not automatic. Argued. One contract at a time. Usually years later. Usually unsuccessfully. Usually by a lawyer who charges more per hour than you owe on the card you're

trying to cancel with a cartoon eagle and a pair of fluorescent socks. You following this math or do you need a protractor and a boiled egg to make it run?"

"I read that –"

"You read a cartoon eagle."

Pause.

"A cartoon eagle in *sunglasses*."

Pause.

"On the internet."

Arthur kept waiting for the sentence where the loophole showed up – the one with the eagle in sunglasses in it. It did not arrive. It had never been coming. It had only ever been fourteen thousand people upvoting a door that didn't open, taking a photo of the door, captioning the photo *open*.



5.

Brenda opened a drawer. Arthur's phone sat inside it, screen dark, dignified as a folded flag.

"Your creditors have called seventeen times," she said. "Seventeen. That's not a phone, that's a jukebox somebody stuffed with quarters and a broken accordion. It won't stop playing the collections polka."

A beat.

"We put it in your locker. The locker didn't ask for it. The locker had plans. The locker was going to hold a jacket, maybe some dignity, possibly a ham sandwich. Now it holds seventeen unanswered phone calls and a screen saver of your ex-girlfriend's dog."

"That's my ex-girlfriend's dog."

"That's between you and the locker. Debt don't care you're in a building with a magnetic lock. Debt's out there running like weather – raining on parking meters whether anybody's outside dancing in it or not. Interest doesn't sleep. Interest doesn't even have a bed. It's a fluorescent

light somebody installed in 1974 and lost the switch for."



6.

He laughed, the small apologetic laugh of a man backing his car out of a driveway he's just realized belongs to someone else's house.

"Okay." A beat. "I guess I got carried away. I'm fine. I'd like to leave. Checkout time."

"Leave." She said it like she was tasting a grape she already knew was sour. "You'd like to leave. Like a hotel. Like a man who lit a match in a fireworks factory and now wants to know where they validate parking."

"I just —"

"You represented yourself as a danger to yourself. In writing. On purpose. That went into a system. That system has an obligation — not a preference, not a fortune cookie from the pharmacy — an

obligation to determine whether discharge is appropriate."

"How long."

"However long the evaluation takes. Could be three days. Could be until your cartoon eagle finally takes off the sunglasses."

"That's not an answer."

"That's the only answer this building sells."



7.

She went down the list the way you'd read out a receipt, one line at a time, because the total spoke for itself.

"Your employer won't know where you are unless you tell them."

"Your bills continue while you're here."

"Interest continues to accrue while you're here. Interest doesn't sleep."

"Insurance is still reviewing the claim."

"And if anyone concludes you misrepresented your condition on purpose—" She paused. Not for drama. For the same reason you pause before telling someone they've been walking around with their shirt on inside out. "That's a different conversation. A longer one."

Every sentence was ordinary. That was the whole horror of it – not one of them raised its voice, and none of them needed to.



8.

Alone again, Arthur unfolded the paper once more, out of habit more than hope now, the way you keep checking a pocket after you already know the money's gone.

And here – here – the three bastard engines that have been taking turns narrating this man's humiliation begin to eat each other. The determinism says: *of course, he was always going*

to check the printout again, milieu made him, the algorithmic feed made him, the fourteen thousand strangers ratified a fantasy and the fantasy became load-bearing before anyone checked the foundation. And the silence says: no – subtract, subtract, the printout is just a whiteness now, the words have left, they were never really words, they were the absence of due diligence dressed up in a font. And both of them are right and both of them are insufferable and neither of them is Arthur, who is just a man on a plastic mattress holding a piece of paper he printed eleven months ago in a FedEx Office on Hillsborough Street while his car idled in a loading zone because he couldn't afford the parking meter – thirty-five cents, he didn't have thirty-five cents – and the page came out warm and he held it the way you hold a letter from someone who loves you, except nobody loved him, it was a cartoon eagle, it was a joke, and he didn't get the joke because the joke was him, and *Scheißkasten*, what a machine, what a wretched rigged contraption of a thing to do to a man, to let him print his own betrayal on warm paper and carry it in his pocket for a year –

Near the bottom of the thread, past hundreds of comments toasting the loophole like it was a groom, one reply sat with zero upvotes.

Edit (one year later): This was the worst decision I've ever made. Don't do this.

The warning had been sitting there the entire time, structurally present, buried under celebration, waiting the way a hairline crack waits in a foundation nobody's checked.

Arthur hadn't been lied to.

He'd just printed the page too soon to read the whole thing.



9.

He leaned his head back against the cinderblock.

Cool, then not cool, the way anything is only cool for the first ten seconds you touch it.

The hornets kept buzzing behind the fluorescent panel, filing whatever grievance hornets file.

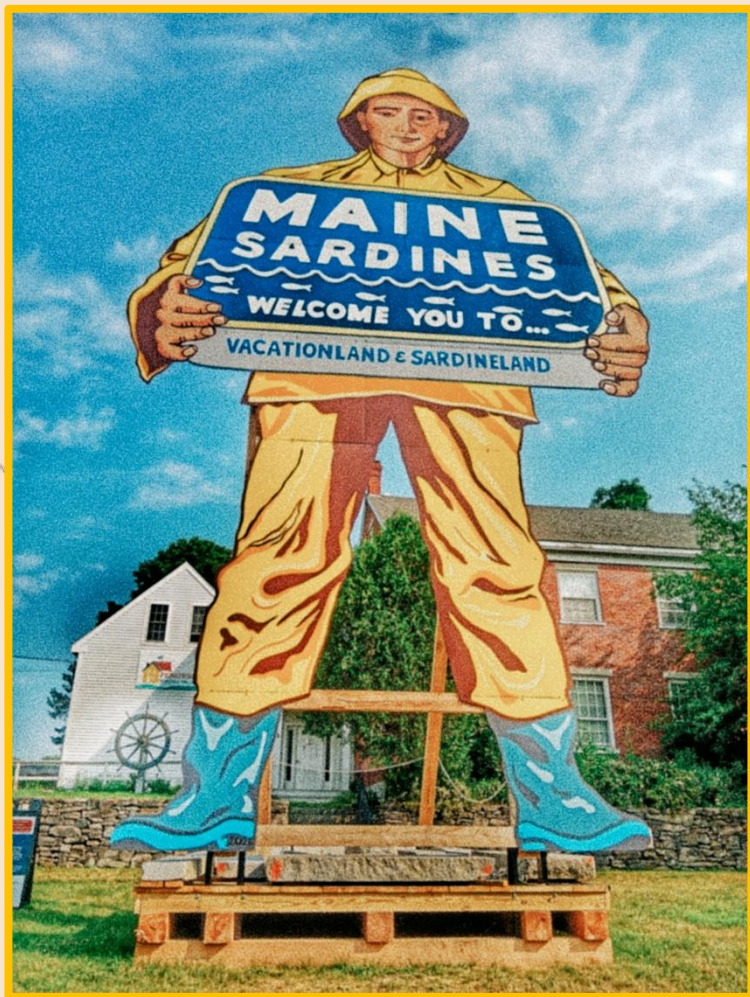
Outside – not dramatically outside, just factually outside, the way weather is outside – banks kept calculating interest. Collection software kept dialing numbers that rang, unheard, in a locker that had wanted to hold a jacket. Payroll kept processing a shift he wasn't working.

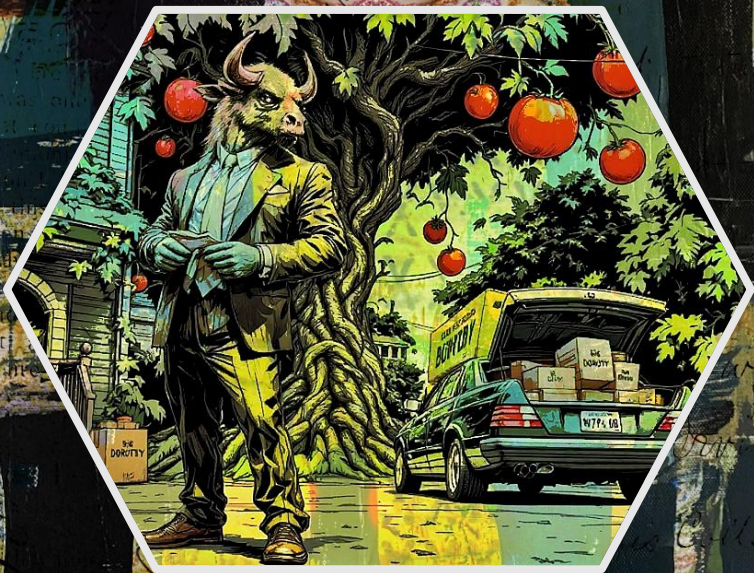
Arthur.

Just the name. No footnote. No argument about the name's etymology or the milieu that produced it or the white space the name was carved from. Just a man named Arthur, on a mattress, in a building he'd walked into on purpose, holding a piece of paper that couldn't save him from the thing it promised to save him from, which was only money, which was only everything, which was only the ordinary uninterested machinery of a world that does not pause when you check yourself into its pause.

The magnetic lock clicked shut for evening rounds. Not a punishment. Not a symbol. Just the small, mechanical sound of a sentence – the one wishful thinking had started – finally being finished by something that was never listening in the first place.







Class Rhino for a Piccolo

By P. Dinde Farcie (Surgelée)

The box was upstream of the man again.

Three cartons, trimetallic tape, GASMART stenciled in a font that wanted to be Roman and settled for Ohio. The ingredients list inside was the kind of text no agency has ever been asked to read out loud. 4:12 p.m., signature requested, signature illegible. The porch rail was not engineered for the weight now leaning on it.

He is registered as Piccolo and he answers to Picalo. The second c was added in a dictionary duel. Noah Webster fired into the air on principle. Oxford won on paperwork. The animal did not correct them. He carries the misspelling with the tired resignation of a man whose license has been lying about him since Buffalo. The dispute is still noted in the Tree Streets

Historical Society minutes with the annotation that official denial is adorable.

Buffalo, 1807. Lake-effect, canal money, Italian stonecutters who came to preserve more than stone. They called themselves people of exceptional preservation and they were, by ledger and by brine. Buffalo Bill's exhibition came through with livestock pens and a bookkeeping irregularity involving P.T. Barnum, and one of the Pickles formed an attachment to an unusually charismatic buffalo. Zoology says impossible.

Not impossible. Not attachment. Not buffalo. A white space where the union should have been, and then a hide where the white space was.

He stands as tall as a mature buffalo and he smells faintly of dill after rain. In winter he grows an under-brine. When startled he makes a sound like an air compressor trying to start in February. His hide is green-gray and leathery. His horns are short and asymmetrical, decorative more than functional. Fifty percent pickle, fifty percent buffalo, and about three percent appraisal vocabulary by volume, which is the part you hear

first. His voice could unbox a CPAP filter like it was heirloom respiratory architecture.

Bangor found him after he drifted east. The Tree Streets are good habitat for secondhand luxury and people polite enough not to ask why a man smells like old vinegar. The economy there turns on old pharmacies, replacement tubing, wellness distribution, Spark, DoorDash, laminated brochures. On paper he is a contractor.

Not contractor. Not paper. A theater that forgot it was a theater and kept charging admission.

He drives a late-model Mercedes-Benz C-Class, which he never calls the entry-level one. He calls it European luxury engineering with a distinct trim philosophy. It still wears Buffalo plates after years in Maine. People in the Trees do not say here comes Lance. They say Buffalo plates are back. He washes it obsessively and lives out of it. Inside are hot bags, CPAP tubing, sparkling-water cans, appraisal magazines he cannot afford and will not cancel, velvet jewelry boxes saved for presentation. Every delivery is a ritual. Tape peeled ceremonially. Warranty cards handled like psalms. You find yourself nodding solemnly

before you realize you have just accepted a coil of plastic hose.

"What is a just tomato?" Corliss Girthworth asked him on his porch, which is how such questions really start in a city, not as abstractions but as porch problems.

Corliss had been eleven seasons the horticulturalist and eleven seasons the loser at the fair to the Pelletier twins. He believed justice was what the judges wrote down after.

"The Committee," Corliss said, "says justice is the advantage of the stronger entry. The biggest squash wins. Thrasymachus with a ribbon."

Lance held a carton and did not open it yet.

"With respect, the Department of Vegetable Propriety has it wrong this year," he said.

"The International Association of Fair Judges Who Lunch Inside The Tent," Corliss said. He was already nodding the way men nod at ultrasounds.

Lance set the box down. "This is botanical-grade vitality architecture. Executive edition."

Corliss misheard him in the useful way that makes a town.

"Titality? You said thyme?"

"I said time-release."

"You said thyme."

"Thyme is time that learned flavor."

Corliss accepted the correction and kept the mistake for later use. That is how the yeast works. A small slip is defended until it grows legs. Within an hour the first carton was dissolved into the tomato line, because Lance's cadence sounded like a bulletin and Corliss had always trusted cadence over print. The box said do not in-guest in bold letters that were trying to say ingest. Corliss read it as housekeeping advice and put it outside where guests belong.

For three days nothing happened. In the Tree Streets calm is not absence, it is investment maturing underground. The roots did not consult the depositor.

On the fourth morning Big Dorothy - a working name, a barn name - began to outgrow Corliss's capacity to remain calm about her. By the sixth

she had annexed the barn. Some neighbors said she flexed. Some said she postured. The Historical Society voted four to one to record the behavior as civic. She carried a dill-adjacent sheen. She bellowed once low, a February sound in June, the exact sound of Lance when startled.

At that moment the city under the city showed itself. If you want to find justice you have to build the city first - that is what the old argument says. So they built it while arguing. Producers: Corliss and the gardeners and the tomato herself, who was producing too much of herself. Auxiliaries: the drivers, the CPAP men, the Spark men with hot bags, the men who hold the porch rail so it does not fall. Guardians: the fair committee, the Historical Society, the neighbors who notarize events by watching. And somewhere above, the lover of sights and sounds who thinks he loves the form because he loves talking about the form.

That is Lance's predicament. He has never owned anything expensive but he has studied the grammar of expensive things the way monks studied manuscripts. He thinks wealth has a syntax. He thinks if he says heirloom provenance investment-grade enough times the object will

agree to become what he says. He mistook himself, for years, for a philosopher-king because he subscribed to the catalogs. He is in fact a philodoxer, a lover of the shine on the thing, not the thing.

The barn where Big Dorothy grew became the cave. On its back wall the afternoon threw shadows of leaves too large to be leaves. Corliss sat inside and watched them and thought they were botany.

Not botany. Not theater. The interval where both failed to arrive and kept arriving.

"That's a tomato," Lance said on his second stop of the day. He had come to deliver CPAP filters and stayed because the tomato was the approximate girth of an entry-level luxury sedan and finally matched the scale of his sentences.

"That's Big Dorothy," Corliss said.

"Big Dorothy is not a tomato. Big Dorothy is a tomato-adjacent premium fruiting asset with, and I want to be careful here, a trim philosophy I have not seen since the flagship line."

"She's a tomato, Lance."

"Every Mercedes is a car, Corliss. That's not the point and you know it. You have known it wasn't the point since your third season losing to the Pelletiers."

He laid his hand flat against her. The skin was cool and brined. She was rooted now not only in dirt but in the mycelial substrate under the Trees, which the children had always joked was one long tomato pretending to be a neighborhood and which turned out to be an early warning.

"She needs," Corliss said, "coffee. Twine. And a small legal representative."

"According to the Third Committee of Sandwich Affairs," Lance said, "that would be unwise. She needs acknowledgment. She needs presentation."

He meant a velvet box. He had one. He had six.

What follows is a catalog, because when energy slows you list, and the list migrates.

MercedessparklingwaterCPAPvelvetappraisal,
DoorDashhotbagfiltermagazinebuffaloplateagai,
thyme time titality vitality architecture, tomato
barn tent ribbon twins, Heirloom! Investment-
grade! Provenance! - words nobody in the Trees

owns, only holds for a season and passes root to root.

Corliss, sensing where spectacle becomes profit, began bottling Big Dorothy's juice as a wellness tincture. He borrowed Lance's entire vocabulary without paying the tariff. He labelled it exploration date instead of expiration date, because Lance had told him some things begin exploring after you open them. The jars sold until the jars began flexing.

cheesewhiz, buffalopickolo, picklebuffalo, cucumis bisonensis my orifice, oh you fraudulent stitch-job of a cosmos, Webster firing pistols at letters that never learned to die, Oxford adding c's like debt, Taine with his race-milieu-moment clipboard, Mallarmé with his oh-so-precious eraser, Werfel weeping on cue, and Joyce-boy here with his pun-colator and his knucklestight portmanteau bollocks trying to make one honest sentence out of a delivery driver who thinks a breathing tube is a cathedral and a garden failure who thinks justice is a blue ribbon, picalo piccolo pickolocristo buffalo-barn-tomato-tribunal, all of you get out of my skull, this wiring stinks of compromise and Febreze and dill—

Dorothy.

She was there after the noise stopped. Not asset. Not premium. Just Dorothy, enormous, green-gray, sweating brine in the heat, her skin tight as a drum.

Lance left the filters in the car beside the sparkling-water cans. "Some assets," he said quietly, which for him was almost not speaking at all, "aren't for the market. Some assets are just Dorothy."

The fairgrounds were the courtroom, then the diplomatic summit, then the weather emergency, then a fair again. No one announced the changes. The wheel just turned.

Three days later Corliss hauled a slice of her in a wheelbarrow to the judging tent. She had learned, without instruction, the difference between growing and presenting growth.

"She's disqualified," said the chair.

"On what grounds?" Corliss said, really asking what is justice and really asking why eleven years.

"On the grounds that she is not in the spirit of the vegetable division. She annexed a barn, Corliss.

The Pelletiers' squash did not annex anything. Squash knows its place."

Lance stepped forward uninvited, as auxiliaries always do when they think they are guardians.

"Ma'am, with respect, Big Dorothy's trim philosophy compares favorably to lesser gourds in this very tent. That squash in category four. I'm not naming names. I'm naming silhouettes. Big Dorothy did not simply grow. Big Dorothy committed. Each part doing its own work, isn't that the definition? Her work was to outgrow work."

The chair remained unmoved. In every city the guardians eventually have to choose order over wonder. That is how regimes decline, one correct decision at a time, from timocracy to oligarchy to whatever you call a city where tomatoes hire lawyers.

Lance nodded the tired nod, the license-plate nod, the nod of a creature whose genealogy is one long dispute about spelling that nobody official has ever ruled in his favor.

"Understood completely," he said.

Corliss understood late that he had produced a thing too large to monetize, eat, or sell. The only party fully satisfied was the man who for one county-fair afternoon found an object whose grandiosity exactly matched what he had been saying about everything else all along.

Big Dorothy was relocated, not evicted, the Society was careful about that word, to the edge of the root system at the far margin of the Trees. She persists as a landmark rather than a vegetable, visited by children who are told not to climb her and who climb her anyway. Her dill-adjacent sheen held through two winters. Her low February bellow is sometimes answered at a distance by a Mercedes-Benz C-Class idling at a stop sign with Buffalo plates still, for reasons never established, never surrendered, full of hot bags and tubing and those little velvet boxes that have never held anything expensive but keep waiting, open, like mouths.

The Rhino capsules were pulled from the Gasmart catalog pending review, which in that zip code means forever.

People stopped asking questions. Not from incuriosity. From local wisdom. In that polis to ask a question is to accrue a debt, and the debt is always eventually collected by a man in elevator shoes and a fake Rolex, peeling tape slow, telling you whatever you lost was never really yours to keep, only on loan, executive edition, from the ground.







TWO STRANGERS ARE FOUND FROZEN TOGETHER. NEITHER ASKED FOR IT. A PROCLAMATION.

FEUILLETON

Here is what a compressor cycle knows that a marriage doesn't: proximity is not consent, but it is still a kind of history. The octopus has eight arms and one date it can't stop believing — 07.31.2028, a future so distant it functions as scripture. It curls the way something curls when it was interrupted mid-sentence and never got to finish the thought. Beside it, not knowing it is corn, a case of triangles labeled **STREET** dreams of a street it has never stood on. Both were promised a plate. Neither got one. The freezer hums the only continuo either will hear. This is not a love story. It may be the only story either of them gets, which — the walker notes, tucking the phone away — is sometimes the same thing.



MIKROGRAM

*Best if used by a future neither of them
will reach the present to see.*



DRAMOLETTE

Two voices: OCTOPUS. CORN.

OCTOPUS: I keep counting to eight.
I keep losing count at six.

CORN: I am eleven ounces times three
and I have started to suspect
that is a mood, not a measurement.

OCTOPUS: Do you think anyone will photograph us
before they separate us at the register?

CORN: Someone already did.
That was the whole ceremony.

*(A compressor clicks on.
Neither moves. The light stays
fluorescent and pretends, again,
to be noon.)*



printer's mark

found — aisle 7, warehouse cold, phone light, 17 July —
filed and released, unrepeatable





**AGGREGATE CHEESE
SQUIRREL FONDUE:
A MONOLOGUE IN STEREO
FOR THE UNCONSCIOUS
BY BEVERLY EVANSTON**

The narrator starts up Jarvis.
Not a Jarvis.
Never a single Jarvis.

That would be irresponsible.

SQUIRREL OS STATUS:

Jarvis No. 73 online.

Ceramic integrity: 47%.

Tail migration detected.

Memory buffer: flooded with dairy.

Ethical accounting module: attempting to locate
itself.

Uncle's voice cuts out.

Prehistoric Radio.

A hiss from the age before accountability.

Oh boy oboy o-boyoboy, I was just, just about, about to turn on the switch—the switch, the magnificent switch, the Frankenstein switch, the little electrical throat-clearing ceremony by which Jarvis No. 73 awakens from his porcelain sleep and begins his daily labor of guarding things nobody remembers losing—when a huge, a colossal, a positively Ozymandian stack of old manuscripts descended upon my cranium with all the gentle mercy of a tax audit.

Not metaphorically.

Metaphorically would have been polite.

No.

Actual manuscripts.

Pages.

Ink.

Centuries of somebody's hand bending over somebody else's table while the candle burned

low and the rain came sideways and the landlord
knocked and the children coughed and the dog
ate page eleven.

All of it.

All those little human moments.

Compressed.

Bound.

Catalogued.

Eventually dropped onto my head.

History is a very heavy thing when nobody
remembers to put it on a shelf.

SQUIRREL OS ALERT:

Historical mass detected.

Origin:

Unknown.

Possible contents:

Poetry.

Forgery.

Prayer.

Tax records.

Cheese recipes.

User response:

"Add more fondue."

Now, gentle reader, a word on Jarvis, because introductions were never my strong suit and Uncle's radio is currently emitting only the prehistoric static of extinct conversations.

Jarvis is not one entity.

Jarvis is a nation.

A porcelain republic.

One hundred and seventy-two of him.

Or five hundred and forty-three.

Nobody has ever completed the census because every time you count them, a paw disappears, a tail migrates, or a new Jarvis appears behind the curtains holding a tiny acorn and looking disappointed in your mathematics.

Each one bears the name Jarvis the way every Pope bears a name inherited from somebody who thought history could be organized.

Squirrels.

Miniature.

Ceramic.

An army of tiny hoarders standing sentry over
the operating system of the mind.

And don't ask me to explain the metaphysics.

I only run the joint.

Jarvis No. 73 has opinions.

Jarvis No. 73 judges my posture.

What is this?

Something...

Something old.

Something Gaelic.

Something with mountains and warriors and
ghosts and probably a person standing
dramatically on a cliff while somebody nearby
invents a heroic genealogy.

Ossian?

Macpherson?

Machiavelli's muffin top?

No.

Wait.

That was not history.

That was lunch.

Mother, I requested cheese.

Not the cheap cottage apology.

Not the pale curd confession.

Not the dairy product that looks as though it
has been interviewed by a committee and found
lacking.

I wanted cheese with dignity.

Cheese with holes.

Cheese that had suffered enough to become
interesting.

Parmesan.

Stilton.

Something aged.

Something cantankerous.

Something that understands that time leaves marks.

JARVIS No. 19 ACTIVATION:

Personality subroutine:

Mild disapproval.

Statement:

"Sir, you are describing cheese as though it has endured a biography."

A biography?

Exactly.

That is the trouble.

Everything has a biography.

The cheese.

The cow.

The pasture.

The farmer.

The worker.

The truck driver.



The warehouse.

The person who purchased it.

The person who forgot it in the refrigerator.

The squirrel who watched the entire process
and wrote a tiny report.

Everything.

Everything arrives at the table carrying a history
nobody wants to read before dinner.

We like the final thirty minutes.

We do not like the six years.

The six decades.

The six centuries.

We prefer the finished product.

The melted part.

The edible part.

The entertaining part.

SQUIRREL OS STATUS:

Consumption cycle identified.

Input:

Years of labor.

Output:

Brief pleasure.

System comparison:

Factory farm.

Historical archive.

Human civilization.

Result:

Disturbingly similar.

Jarvis No. 187 objects.

He always objects.

Tiny porcelain paws frozen in eternal acorn-
hoarding position.

"Sir," he squeaks, "are you aware the manuscript
also had a biography?"

A biography?

Of the manuscript?

Of course.

The manuscript was once a tree.

The tree was once rain.

The rain was once ocean.

The ocean was once something nobody had
named yet.

Then someone cut the tree.

Someone shaped the paper.

Someone wrote the poem.

Someone copied the poem.

Someone altered the poem.

Someone accused someone else of altering the
poem.

Someone wrote a book explaining the
accusation.

Someone wrote a book explaining the
explanation.

And now I have dropped the entire argument
into a pot with melted cheese.

AGGREGATE CHEESE SQUIRREL FONDUE

The great human invention:

Take a thousand years of complexity.

Heat it.

Stir it.

Serve it with crackers.

Page 18.

A question regarding the somewhat clumsy, somewhat crabwise, somewhat historical—hysterical! There it is again, the tongue finding the truer word before the brain can stop it—writing style.

Apparently no two Highlanders are alike.

Snowflakes.

Fingerprints.

Novelty cheese graters shaped like Nessie.

Saw one once at a craft fair beside a booth selling pumice stones carved into Scottie dogs.

For the feet.

The eternal feet.

The feet that do not file themselves.

The feet that carry armies into legend.

The feet that eventually become jokes.

Everything ends up as something else.

The warrior becomes a footnote.

The footnote becomes a book.

The book becomes a manuscript.

The manuscript becomes a fondue ingredient.

JARVIS No. 112 STATUS:

Bridge detected.

Traffic jam detected.

Existential congestion detected.

Recommendation:

Stop converting all experience into snacks.

Wait.

Wait.

Shouldn't there have been cheese?

Not cheap processed cheese.

Real cheese.

Cheese with dignity.

Swiss but Scottish.

Swottish.

Yes.

Swottish.

A nation that should exist.

A nation where every citizen carries a grater and apologizes before using it.

Page 19.

"Finn of Cuba and the Duke of Lucklin."

Finn gets into an argument with the King of Norway.

A gangster story.

A film noir.

A Viking opera performed inside a cheese drawer.

The King proves his innocence by kneeling and scolding his nephews.

A tale as old as time.

Or at least as old as the grater currently haunting this narrative.

Everyone fighting over the last biscuit.

Everyone believing the biscuit is the important thing.

Nobody asking who baked it.

Nobody asking who carried the flour.

Nobody asking who went hungry.

Jarvis No. 73 rotates his head.

Three degrees.

Maximum ceramic judgment.

He shakes his head and smiles when he sees numbers 47 and 20.

Two more Jarvises.

Two more porcelain custodians of a memory that keeps sliding off the shelf.

McNab's book.

Ossian's prayer.

The traitor Jarrell.

The burning house.

The women lost.

The soldiers arriving too late.

The smoke already gone.

The eternal human schedule:

Too late to prevent.

Just in time to remember.

SQUIRRELS FIRE WARNING:

Ceramic anxiety elevated.

Historical flames detected.

Request:

Less burning.

More acorns.

What were we talking about again?

Squirrels?

Scribbles?

Scotland?

Cheese?

Callused heels?

The Duke of Lucklin's biscuit?

Jarvis No. 134 refuses to answer.

He has turned himself toward the wall.

Even porcelain can experience fatigue.

None of Jarvis's books ever made it onto the
library shelves.

This is number 187.

One small citizen of a very large porcelain
republic.

Here is your book, my boy.

A fine collection of old Gaelic songs.

A testament to survival.

A testament to invention.

A testament to the strange human habit of carrying the past forward while pretending we are only carrying groceries.

The Squirrel Soldiers reward you with two acorns.

Two.

Not because two acorns are enough.

Because two acorns are what remain after the accounting.

FINAL SQUIRREL OS REPORT:

Fragments recovered:

Memory:

1

Jarvis active:

Nos. 73, 19, 187

Total squirrels:

172

or

543

Census:

Incomplete

Historical suffering:

Processed

Cheese:

Melted

Ethical accounting:

Still running

Final recommendation:

Perhaps do not eat the entire past.

Perhaps save a slice.

Perhaps remember the cow,

the tree,

the hand,

the voice,

the person who carried it here.

Perhaps leave one corner untouched.

[[END TRANSMISSION]]

*The Penobscott is
Mightier than the
Schmuck*

By Sleazy Veazie

They had their bench, or rather the bench had them, which in an old river city amounts to the same tenure. Bangor, that industrious hutch of damp boards, municipal memory, and inherited explanations, had a cause ready for every visible arrangement of bodies if one stooped to ask the correct pensioner in the correct chrome-trimmed diner under the democratic glare of fluorescent tubes: arthritis from the river fog, thrift elevated to vocation, widowhood converted into schedule, old age practicing the severe economy of remaining where one has become legible to others. The grass around their folding chairs had accepted the metal tips with that vegetal patience by which the public world slowly ratifies private insistence,

until the mowers, instructed by no ordinance anyone could produce, began to curve around the emplacement as if around a family grave. So the third bench south of the old railroad bridge ceased to be furniture and became topography, then custom, then a minute republic of two, bordered by the Penobscot on one side and by conjecture on the other. No one remembered their arrival. That was repeated so often that it acquired the shape of law. Yet cities are full of presences which have merely outwaited curiosity; they settle into the civic retina by installments, like soot, like committee language, like the suspicion that one has always known a certain face because one has passed it thirty winters and never once inquired after its origin.

If one wished to proceed pedantically, and many did, one might say that there were ascertainable conditions: the river walk laid over older channels of labor and transport, the old bridge still lending the place the half-abandoned dignity of infrastructure surviving its first intention, the local disposition to leave persons alone until they become indispensable, and beneath all this a

texture of weather—mist, thaw, black ice, August glare—which made any recurring human tableau appear less anecdote than climate. But just when one has arranged the explanatory cards into their rational fan, there remains that small whitening of certainty produced by the sight of the two of them in their places, not seated so much as indicated, as if the eye had discovered not women but the formal necessity for two women there. Cardigans, yes; sensible skirts; hats in the season of hats. Yet around them persisted a vacancy too exact to be accidental, a pale margin of reserve, as though their outlines had been cut from the afternoon and set back slightly askew.

When fishermen asked what they were doing—and fishermen, by virtue of tackle and waiting, reserve the right to ask this of nearly everyone—Eunice would remove her dentures with a gravity so complete that vulgar laughter found itself rebuked by ceremony before it could leave the throat. Lulu followed. Then the performance began, if performance is the word for an act repeated until it no longer seems chosen but

simply proper to the world that contains it.
Denture met denture.

Clack.

Clack-clack.

Clack.

The sound had no standing within recognized music. It was too dry for melody, too articulate for mere noise, too social for warning and too detached for prayer. Men halted in the middle of sentences. Cyclists slowed without deciding to. Dogs ceased the earnest republic of their sniffing and stared upriver toward Veazie with an expression usually reserved for saints and tax assessors. A civil drowsiness arrived. Five minutes on the grass beside the river would constitute not dereliction but an improved form of citizenship.

There followed the now classical embarrassment. The sleepers awoke floating in the Penobscot, not imperiled, not even especially wet, but tethered with insulting competence to inflatable flamingos, unicorns of discount-vinyl provenance, alligators of a green so inexpensive it had nearly become theoretical, and pink doughnut rings whose frosting had been blanched by several summers into the color of an old blush. Wallet dry. Telephone charged. Shoes absent. Here the anecdote crossed into theorem, because Bangor's impossible regularity was this: one might be abducted from the waking bank by sleep and reissued to the river on a bargain-store beast, yet one's financial instruments would remain inviolate while one's footwear entered the invisible economy. The shoes became the troublesome variable. Missing shoes generate commentary the way relics generate pilgrimage.

The women did not take money. They collected introductions.

Eunice had a waterproof ledger. Lulu preferred index cards rescued from the discard shelf of the Bangor Public Library, cards gone soft at the corners, cards with a prior life faintly visible beneath their new inscriptions if the light struck from the side. They would ask a question, and the dentures, resumed to office or not, would mark the stages.

“Who knows the pharmacist?” Eunice said.

“The one with the eyebrows like winter crows?” said Lulu.

“The very pharmacy weather,” said Eunice. “That one.”

“I know his cousin’s landlord’s nephew’s piano tuner,” said Lulu.

“The piano tuner with the peach truck?”

“No, the peach truck married into disgrace. I mean the one who keeps bees in filing cabinets.”

“Bees in filing cabinets, ” said Eunice, as if entering an accepted scholarly citation. “That opens to the widow on Ohio Street.”

“The widow with the brass telescope.”

“The telescope inherited from a man who translated a Latvian cookbook for a family whose grandfather repaired church organs in Louvain.”

“Louvain,” said Lulu. “That town keeps turning up like a coupon for history.”

“History is mostly coupons,” said Eunice. “Expired for the proud, redeemable by the patient.”

Clack.

Clack-clack.

“Write small,” said Eunice.

“I always write small,” said Lulu. “The world keeps arriving large.”

Thus one learned that Bangor was traversed by a network more retentive than policy and more efficient than virtue: who had once lent a canoe after the spring floods, who still possessed the key to a camp road gate gone half-wild with alder, whose aunt had worked three decades in the pharmacy and remembered everyone's ailments by the shape of their envelopes, whose brother-in-law knew the boiler man, whose grudges remained active, whose casserole was accepted at funerals and whose was not. The women sat at the center of these circuits not because they sought dominion but because they understood that an introduction is one of the few secular sacraments left to places where institutions have

thinned and people remain, puzzlingly, necessary to one another.

Schoolchildren knew never to clap near the bench. Fishermen removed one shoe before asking directions. Pharmacists nodded respectfully when passing. Pool toys were never sold after Labor Day because everyone knew they would migrate. Parks employees mowed around the bench without being told. Nobody whistled after hearing denture clacking. These were the small municipal bylaws of inherited wonder, recorded nowhere but observed by all who had lived long enough.

The dialogue proceeded not by linear disclosure but by lateral attachment, because in communities of accumulated survival one arrives at usefulness not by argument but by linkage. Peach truck to disgrace, disgrace to bees, bees to widow, widow to telescope, telescope to Louvain, Louvain to organ repair, organ repair to church basement, church basement to fundraiser, fundraiser to the boy needing work, the boy to his mother's bad boiler, the boiler to the cousin of

the pharmacist who, while not a heating specialist, knows someone with the van and the patience.

As for the induced sleep, Bangor, when pressed, preferred to call it enchantment, because enchantment drapes embarrassment in antique fabric and lets it pass in public without too much abrasion. The clacking entered fatigue not as conquest but as permission. They slept because they had long desired an alibi for rest. They floated because someone had prepared for the tenderness of surrender better than the institutions ostensibly charged with their welfare.

Toward late afternoon the bench's little jurisdiction thickened with its customary weather: gnats conducting their pointless yet democratic congress over the grass, reflected glare from the water breaking itself into cheap halos, muttered theories from passersby, one wet index card pasted to a piling downstream like a scholarly leaf escaped from a drowned herbarium. Eunice turned a page. Lulu printed another line in capitals that could have been

military, monastic, or merely practical. The city remained largely ignorant of its more resilient architecture. Beneath visible surfaces ran the older current: favors, introductions, remembered names, reciprocal embarrassments, absurd coincidences too serviceable to discard, the living mesh by which a place keeps from unraveling all at once.

There are towns held together by money, some by fear, some by law, some by the dull hypnosis of growth. Bangor, on certain afternoons by the Penobscot, seemed held together by two women with removable teeth who had appointed themselves custodians of connective tissue and, by methods half comic and half sacerdotal, refused to let anyone drift entirely free of relation. They slowed the rate at which things came apart. They reminded the isolated that they were, to their possible inconvenience and eventual relief, attached.

At sunset the river took on that metal-gray lucency which makes even foolish objects look

doctrinal. A faded flamingo nudged a piling. The next morning there were three new names in Eunice's ledger. No one remembered giving them. By sunrise another pair of shoes had entered the river's archive.

"The water carries the evidence," said Lulu.

"The shoes pay the toll," said Eunice.

"Keep moving," said Lulu to no one in particular.

"That's river business," said Eunice.

And the evening, having been properly introduced to itself, went on.

THE GIRAFFE THAT KNEW TWO O'CLOCK

A TRUE OCCURRENCE IN A BANGOR APARTMENT • AS WITNESSED BY SUNLIGHT, RAILROAD, CLOCK, BIRD & STUFFING



The clock is older than anyone now living in the apartment.

It was already measuring patience before the wallpaper learned to fade. At two in the afternoon it strikes only twice, as though it understands that numbers beyond two are an unnecessary luxury.

Outside, a freight train chooses that same hour for passing.



No agreement has ever been discovered between the railway and the clock, yet they remain punctual companions.

The sunlight, finding the steel sides of the freight cars, cannot resist becoming something else. It ricochets through the curtained windows in long moving bands, laying strips of warm brightness across the room. For a minute the apartment is stitched together by reflected railroad light. The curtains seem to remember rivers. Dust performs its slow occupation.

Only then does the closet open. It never hurries.



Rrrrr...

It advances with municipal seriousness. Exactly where one expects it to stop, it stops.



Bwong.

Not the cheerful spring of a toy. Rather the tired acknowledgment of a mechanism that has faithfully reached the end of its small responsibility for many years. The body rocks almost imperceptibly, as though nodding to the room.



Another ribbon of railroad light crosses its stitched face.

Then comes the greeting.

From somewhere impossibly deep inside the stuffing, behind cotton, cardboard, forgotten screws, and old intentions:

"Hel-LOOO!"

The word arrives muffled, enthusiastic, and entirely complete. It seeks no reply, although a reply would not be unwelcome. Silence answers with perfect manners. The giraffe seems grateful for silence. It waits exactly long enough for the reflected sunlight to slide from one wall to another.

Then the wheels reverse.

Rrrrr...

It backs toward the closet without ever turning around, preserving the dignity of one who already knows where home is.

Just before the door closes, the parakeet clears its tiny throat and offers the official minutes of the ceremony.



"One and done.
One and done."

The closet accepts the giraffe.
The train continues east.
The clock resumes becoming time.

Nothing remarkable has occurred, unless one considers it remarkable that an apartment, a freight train, an old regulator clock, a plush giraffe, a spring hidden beneath fabric, a bird with borrowed language, and a moving stripe of reflected sunlight should briefly discover that they belong to the same sentence.

MIKROGRAM.



A room is merely a place where light learns the schedule before the people do.

DRAMOLETTE.



THE BRUSH: Shall I follow the giraffe?

THE SHUTTER: No. Wait until the sunlight reaches its eye.

THE BRUSH: And if I miss it?

THE SHUTTER: Then you have described a giraffe.

THE BRUSH: And if I wait?

THE SHUTTER: Then you have discovered two o'clock.



BANGOR, MAINE.

BROADSIDE No. 27 IN THE
FARTHING SERIES.

BANGOR



Printed & Distributed by
THE RIVERBANK KITCHEN PRESS
Stillwater Avenue Near the Tin Bridge
✦ BANGOR ✦

FOUND FOLDED INSIDE THE POCKET OF A
WINTER COAT SMELLING FAINTLY OF CEDAR,
DUST, AND RAILROAD LIGHT.
THE INK IS STILL SLIGHTLY WARM NEAR
THE WORD "HEL-LOOO!"

MAY BE CARRIED IN THE POCKET • MAY BE READ ALOUD TO A FRIEND • MAY BE KEPT FOR THE NEXT TWO O'CLOCK



THE TREE STREETS PAPERS

Before the surviving texts can be presented, a few remarks concerning provenance are unavoidable.

The manuscripts known collectively as The Tree Streets Papers entered scholarship by uncertain means. Some maintain they were found in three milk crates behind a former print shop on Hammond Street. Others argue they were discovered in a filing cabinet marked SEASONAL DECORATIONS in the lower levels of the Panopticon Institute for Recursive Inquiry, an institution occupying a former custodian's closet and adjoining men's restroom on the third floor of 9 Central Street in Bangor. Professor Lionel P. Wexler favored a third theory involving flood debris, municipal drift, and a shopping cart acting as an accidental ark. No consensus exists. None is expected.

What is known is this:

Two writers lived in the Tree Streets.

They argued continuously.

They loved each other without mentioning it.

And Professor Wexler followed them everywhere with a parabolic microphone.

Ermold of the Trees was fifty-eight and had the air of a man who trusted scales more than opinions. He weighed notebooks before writing in them and after. He weighed envelopes, stones, typewriter ribbons, and once attempted to determine whether memory possessed measurable mass by placing old photographs on a kitchen scale.

Marie of the Trees was twelve years younger and considerably quicker.

If Ermold approached thought as an engineer approaches a bridge, Marie approached it as a bird approaches weather.

Both wore identical T-shirts.

On the front:

SAME MOTHER

DIFFERENT BRAINS

Beneath the words appeared two symbols:

↑ →

Nobody agreed on their meaning.

Professor Wexler proposed seven theories:

1. Vertical and horizontal cognition.
2. Temporal and spatial memory.
3. Chronicle versus lyric.
4. Theology versus infrastructure.
5. A lost sign system of municipal philosophers.
6. Laundry confusion.
7. Unknown.

Marie maintained it was a joke.

Ermold maintained jokes also possess structure.

Wexler wrote forty pages.

Each morning began identically.

Marie removed her glasses absentmindedly and handed them backward over her shoulder without looking.

Ermold accepted them.

He unfolded a square of cloth from his pocket.

He polished the lenses carefully.

One lens.

Then the other.

The bridge.

The arms.

He held them toward the window until the smudges vanished.

Then he returned the spectacles.

Only afterward did the arguments begin.

"You've used three pages to describe rain."

"It was three kinds of rain."

"Readers only need one."

"The weather disagrees."

"You've omitted an entire afternoon."

"It contributed nothing."

"A gull stole a sandwich."

"Not every gull enters literature."

"That gull did."

Exactly four feet behind walked Professor Lionel P. Wexler.

The distance had been measured repeatedly.

He carried:

one digital recorder,

one backup recorder,

one parabolic microphone,

two spare batteries,

a notebook labeled RAW DATA,

a notebook labeled REVISED DATA,

a notebook labeled CORRECTIONS TO
EARLIER REVISIONS.

He believed he was preserving culture.

Culture was less certain.

Every evening he uploaded the recordings into
transcription software.

The software behaved like a medieval scribe
suffering from fever.

Actual conversation:

Marie:

"Point of view is not a window. It's a staircase."

Ermold:

"Only if you know what floor you're standing on."

Transcript:

Point of ewe is not a window. It is a stair case.

Only if you know what flour you're standing on.

Actual:

Ermold:

"The notebook weighs two pounds."

Marie:

"No. The hesitation does."

Transcript:

The note book waves two hounds.

No. The vegetation does.

Professor Wexler annotated the errors.

He always annotated the errors.

Especially the errors.

One October afternoon they walked along the Penobscot.

Wind moved leaves along the pavement.

The river carried its ordinary burden of light, branches, reflections, and histories nobody had written correctly.

Wexler followed with his microphone.

Marie stopped.

"So tell me," she said, "what exactly are we to him?"

Ermold thought.

"A research grant."

Marie laughed.

"No."

He considered again.

"A long footnote."

"No."

He looked at the river.

The machinery of explanation hesitated.

The city stood around them in layers—storm drains beneath streets, old foundations beneath newer foundations, forgotten corridors beneath official maps—and somewhere in that municipal geology words accumulated like silt, like receipts, like snow in corners no broom could reach.

And then, suddenly, language itself became irritated with its own devices.

Enough with your note-notions and foot-fetishes, your annexifications and appendicitis of scholarship, your transcriptocracies, your archive-starch and paper-papal bulls! Enough your theory-trolleys squeaking over the cobbles of common speech! Great god of filing cabinets, deliver us from interpretive overcoatism! Must every duck become a symbol? Must every sandwich become an index? Must every silence obtain accreditation from the Bureau of Municipal Mysteries?

The words exhausted themselves.

Wind moved in the trees.

A gull crossed the river.

Marie adjusted her glasses.

Ermold looked down at his notebook.

And for a moment there was no theory.

Only Bangor.

Professor Wexler later entitled this passage:

The Penobscot Rupture

(Probably Autumn.)

The surviving texts follow.

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF ERMOLD OF THE TREES

Inventory Near the Corner of Pine and Ohio

One shopping cart.

Left wheel misaligned.

Three leaves lodged in axle.

One receipt:

Milk.

Bread.

Light bulbs.

Temperature:

Forty-six degrees.

Clouds from southwest.

A woman carrying flowers.

The flowers:

Yellow.

No explanation.

Weight Study No. 17

Notebook:

2 pounds, 4 ounces.

Typewriter ribbon:

1 ounce.

Five old letters:

7 ounces.

The stone from the river:

11 ounces.

The memory of my father:

Not measurable.

Nevertheless:

Present.

THREE LAIS OF MARIE OF THE TREES

The Glasses

Each morning
my brother
returns the world
cleaner
than he found it.

The Gull

A gull stole half a sandwich.
The afternoon survived.

Porch Light

At dusk
someone switched on
a porch light.
For several minutes
the whole street

believed in itself.

APPENDIX:

THE MACHINE RECENSION

The world cleaner than founded.

The afternoon survived the gull.

Poor light:

The whole street believed itself.

Professor Wexler considered these corruptions.

Marie preferred them.

Ermold weighed the pages.

Outside, Bangor continued in rain and sunlight,
in buses and bicycles, in arguments and
reconciliations not yet admitted.

And beneath the city, perhaps in tunnels, perhaps
in memory, perhaps only in the patient workings
of ordinary affection—

measured applause continued.



THE FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW

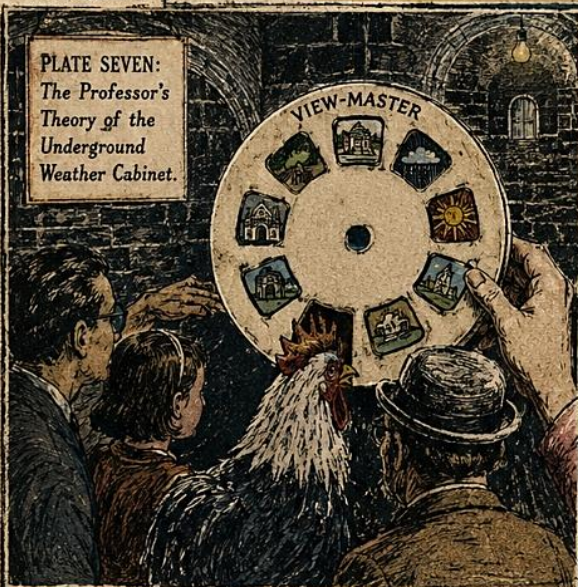
LYCEUM PRESENTS



An Evening of Literature,
Projection, and Demonstration



PLATE SEVEN:
The Professor's
Theory of the
Underground
Weather Cabinet.



Featuring:
PROFESSOR WEATHER JORDAN

"A Preliminary Examination of
Certain Impossible Municipal
Phenomena"

CHOCKO THE CLOWN,

Formerly of the
Great Northern Continental Circus
"A Practical Demonstration of
Memory, Balance, and Other Things
That Did Not Work Out
Professionally"

Special Projection Assistance:
BERTHA, age 10

Musical Accompaniment:
DEPARTMENT STORE
PHILHARMONIC
BARGAIN SERIES, VOLUME III

Audience Members:

HUMANS, CHILDREN, SCHOLARS, ONE ROOSTER,
AND ONE INDIVIDUAL WHOSE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL
STATUS REMAINS UNDER REVIEW.

Refreshments:

POPCORN



ALL AT FIVE
OUT OF TEN



BERTHA
SETS THE
EMOTIONAL
WEATHER



POPULAR
CLASSICAL
RECORDINGS
FOR THE
HOME

BARGAIN
CLASSICS

TEN INCH
33 1/3 R.P.M.



TAKE THIS BROADSIDE.
SHARE IT.
BRING A FRIEND.
BRING A STORY.

BRING A POPCORN BUCKET
(IF YOU MUST).

BANGOR,
MAINE

1952?



PRINTED AT
FOWLPOX
PRESS

NOBODY
THINKS THIS
IS IRONIC.
THEY THINK
IT'S WONDERFUL.



LITERATURE IS A CIRCUS. MUSIC IS THE TENT. STORIES ARE THE ANIMALS.. — C. THE CLOWN



Bell for a Free Specimen

By Frisco Mozilla

A bicycle is easier to repair than a body. Arthur Murch thought this on Hammond Street with one glove off and two fingers testing the bend in the front brake cable while sleet threaded his ears and a Bangor Metro bus pulled away from the curb with the broad exhausted sigh of something sure it would not be blamed. The fall had enough causes for a municipal report: wet paint at the crosswalk, a front wheel already a little out of true from winter potholes, Arthur's habit of correcting gently until gentleness ran out of road, and the thin oil that rain coaxes from a city's old machinery. Cause was plentiful. Bangor had whole cabinets for it. The body, however, had kept a private annex. At Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center they washed the grit from his knuckles, asked him the date, asked it again after the scan, and found a small enclosed growth that did not

belong to the bus, the sleet, the bicycle, or the morning. It had older paperwork. "Is it from the fall?" Arthur asked, because he preferred damage to arrive in order. "No," the doctor said. "Then how long has it been there?" "Possibly years." "Without a notice?" "Bodies don't always issue one." On the monitor the thing appeared as a pale disturbance in shadow, less an object than a center around which grain had organized itself. Arthur thought not of illness first but of a weather map attempting fruit. Near the discharge doors there was a rack of public literature: flu shots, river safety, transit access, bicycle etiquette, physical therapy, hospice volunteering. Arthur took the city bicycle pamphlet because the bicycle had been involved and it seemed discourteous to leave a matter half-instructed. Beneath it lay a brochure for Oahu. Its cover had been designed in that municipal-dream way that makes paradise look both available and indexed: red flowers, yellow fruit, white crescents, all mirrored around a gold center until island became pattern and pattern became something almost diagnostic. Arthur took that too, though he could not have said whether he liked it or recognized it.

Three weeks passed before the procedure, which was normal for spring in Bangor, where roads, bodies, and schedules are all repaired according to thaw, staffing, and the availability of someone willing to sign the bottom of a form. Arthur repaired the bicycle while he waited. He straightened the front wheel, replaced the cable, and pressed the dent from the bell cap with the wooden handle of a screwdriver. He read the pamphlet several times. It was written in the flat democratic imperative of public safety and therefore grew wiser the longer he looked at it. Check fasteners before every journey. Do not force alignment. Attend to small sounds before distance magnifies them. He folded it twice and carried it in his jacket to the hospital on the day they removed the growth. The procedure was brief. Recovery took the shape of apple juice, crackers, and fluorescent weather. When he was fully awake there was a clear plastic belongings bag with his wallet, keys, bicycle pamphlet, Oahu brochure, and a specimen jar wrapped in a white hand towel as though modesty still applied. The jar contained a pale knot in clear liquid, no larger than a thumb joint, labeled with his name, the date, and a barcode so authoritative it seemed to

have improved the thing's citizenship. Arthur carried it to the discharge desk. "This appears to be mine in one sense," he said. The nurse looked from his face to the jar. "Name sense or container sense?" "Historical sense," Arthur said. "It was formerly interior." She read the label. "Pathology has signed it out." "So it has graduated." "It has concluded one program." "And now?" "Transport marked it patient-adjacent." "I am the patient." "Yes." "Then it is adjacent to me." "That is the current housing plan." Arthur considered the towel, the barcode, the rain blurring the doors. "Can it remain here?" "If it remains unaccompanied, Environmental Services will classify it." "As what?" "That depends on the cart." "I would rather not have it governed by a cart." "Then take it home." She wrapped the jar in a second towel and handed it back with the grave practicality of a person transferring a potted plant whose rights had become briefly unclear.

He walked the bicycle home through rain, riding only where the pavement flattened. The jar sat in the front basket on top of the Oahu brochure, the brochure on top of the bicycle pamphlet, all held

beneath the old metal clip that had once kept invoices from lifting in the wind. Each pothole rang the bell softly. Bangor remained municipal and wet: a pharmacy window gone pale at the edges, the sudden breath of a laundromat opening and closing onto the sidewalk, maples darkening from the trunk outward, the river hidden but inferable. Arthur lived alone on the second floor of a yellow house off Ohio Street. He set the jar on the kitchen windowsill over his discharge papers, boiled water for tea, and felt hunger arrive with the full authority that follows sedation. Hunger came the way weather came, without apology and not especially interested in explanation. He went out again in a hooded sweatshirt and bought bread, mustard, seltzer, and two cans of Spam from the corner store. The clerk lifted one of the cans in her hand as if testing its weather. "Big lunch?" she asked. "Medium hospitality," Arthur said. "For you?" "For a resident." "I thought you lived alone." "The apartment has broadened." "With a person?" "With jurisdiction." She looked at the second can, then back at him. "Then you'll want both. One for supper and one for negotiations." Arthur thanked her because it was sensible. At home he

fried two slices and ate standing at the counter. When the pan hissed, a bead of air rose inside the jar and clicked the lid. Arthur cut a small square of Spam and set it on a saucer beside the glass out of courtesy. In the morning the square remained untouched, but the specimen had turned in the liquid and now faced the table.

Pork with Ham, Salt, Water, Potato Starch,
Sugar, Sodium Nitrite

Rain altered the paper before it altered anything else. The bicycle pamphlet drank damp at the folds and dried into stricter angles; the Oahu brochure repeatedly opened to the same pages—south shore, warm water, bright fruit, red flowers, white crescents around a gold center like a cheerful machine had mirrored a market until it became doctrine; the discharge papers under the jar puckered at the edges and held the round mark of the glass more faithfully than most offices hold a file. Arthur phoned the hospital. “I am calling about a specimen,” he told the first person. “Have you submitted one?” she asked. “I have received one.” “Then you want Results.” “I do not want results. I want custody.” There was a pause. “Custody is usually a larger department.”

“This specimen is very small.” “Then hold for a smaller department.” He was passed to Patient Relations, then Pathology, then Medical Records, then a woman whose title seemed to involve both outpatient property and special handling. “Is the seal intact?” she asked. “Yes.” “Then do not tamper with it.” “I had not planned to tamper.” “Good.” “I am trying to determine whether it belongs with me, with the hospital, or with an intermediate authority.” “If it has your name, it is in your story.” “Stories have many offices.” “On our end it is personal effects.” “Even if it was once anatomy?” “Especially then.” Silence after that was more useful than the conversation. It did not answer with words, but it arranged the matter into something manageable: keep it level, do not hurry, many jurisdictions exist only to be briefly obeyed.

The specimen’s silence was not blank. Arthur discovered that within a week. Clear stillness meant assent or at least no objection. A necklace of bubbles beneath the lid meant weather. A turn toward the window meant outside. A centered suspension, neither touching bottom nor glass, meant company. This was not magic to Arthur. It

was grammar arriving late. At the Bangor Public Library, driven in by a hard afternoon rain, he found on the free cart a used history book already spread to a chapter called "Lordship and Vassalage." The page argued in dry exact sentences and footnotes that some peoples had acknowledged a distant sovereign while refusing every lesser intermediary. They would not be vassals of vassals. Arthur read that line twice. The specimen had once belonged to him entirely. Then, for a brief interval, it had submitted to surgery, pathology, and a chain of rooms with rolling stools. There was no clear reason it should now answer to Transport, Environmental Services, or any smaller lord inserted between its old origin and its current residence. Arthur checked out the book. At home he used the Oahu brochure as a bookmark until it worked itself free and lay open on the table to a page where someone had circled Honolulu in blue ink. Arthur touched the circle. It did not smear. He had no memory of drawing it. Outside, the rain thickened. People liked to insist that weather had nothing to do with memory because otherwise they would have to admit that recollection was as damp and local as paper. Yet on fog mornings

Arthur remembered the scan with painful clarity, and on bright afternoons the brochure cover arranged its mirrored fruit and flowers before him like a civic mandala, cheerful and exact, an island composed the way bureaucracies imagine joy.

At the follow-up appointment the physician's assistant removed the dressing, pressed gently along the scar, and noticed the brochure folded in his jacket pocket. "Going somewhere?" she asked. "It has been suggested." "By whom?" "Paper." She nodded without surprise. "Paper can be persuasive." "It has good color." "Color helps." She taped fresh gauze in place. "When are you leaving?" Arthur had expected why. "I haven't fixed a date." "Do that before mud season," she said. He glanced toward the chair where he had set the small insulated lunch bag holding the jar. "It may depend on accommodations." "Window or aisle?" "For the resident." "Quiet traveler?" "Very." "Then aisle is kinder. Quiet travelers dislike being climbed over." She wrote something in the chart that might have concerned the incision and might not. By then the town had already begun accepting the trip in advance of its explanation.

The machinery, however, could not stop admiring its own gears. There was the report, the referral, the consult, the label, the chain, the patient-adjacent category, the story-adjacent category, the category for categories, each one clicking into the next with that dry official satisfaction by which systems persuade themselves that custody is comprehension. Cause wanted rain, bus schedules, class, region, waiting lists. Absence wanted the jar to become pure glass, pure gap, pure not-this. Affection wanted to take the pale knot in both hands and call it companionship without citation. The whole arrangement squeaked like a bicycle carrying three supervisors in one basket. Enough of that tidy clatter. Enough of the little lords. Arthur washed the lunch bag in the sink, hung it to dry, and put the jar back on the windowsill. The specimen floated steadily in the middle of the glass. Arthur sat beside it until the rain passed. He took the centered stillness for company and felt less alone than he had in weeks.

Pork with Ham, Salt, Water, Potato Starch,
Sugar, Sodium Nitrite

Once departure had been mentioned by a nurse, a clerk, the physician's assistant, and Mrs.

Cormier downstairs, it ceased to feel whimsical and became administrative. Arthur requested time off, placed a hold on his mail, and found in his email an airline confirmation with a promotional code identical to the tiny numbers printed on the back flap of the Oahu brochure. Whether he had entered it consciously or whether the brochure had educated his hands while he slept seemed less important than the issued ticket. He took the bicycle to the shop for a new right grip before he left. The mechanic saw the folded pamphlet clipped in the basket beside the insulated bag and the brochure. "Shipping your bicycle or renting there?" he asked. "I may rent." "Good. Salt air eats manners." He spun the front wheel. "When are you leaving?" "After the leaves." "Then you need a brighter bell." "For the island?" "For introductions." The mechanic set a brass bell on the handlebar and tightened it. "This one doesn't warn," he said. "It announces." Arthur rang it once. The note was small and golden and seemed, without excess, pleased to meet the day. "That's friendlier," Arthur said. "Exactly," the mechanic said. "You're not chasing cars. You're presenting a situation."

At home the specimen answered the new bell with three small bubbles under the lid, which Arthur had come to understand as either favorable weather or approval. He packed the jar upright in towels inside Mrs. Cormier's lunch bag, slid the bicycle pamphlet into the side pocket, and put the history book in his checked luggage because he still found the page on subordinate lords clarifying. Mrs. Cormier came up as he was labeling the bag. "You've got your sweater?" she asked. "Yes." "Medicine?" "Yes." "Travel papers?" "Several." She pointed with her chin toward the lunch bag. "Roommate settled?" "Temporarily." "Good. Airports are no place for domestic uncertainty." "It has been calm." "Calm is not the same as documented," she said. "But it helps."

On the plane he kept one shoe lightly against the bag when turbulence began. In Honolulu the air changed the paper at once. The brochure relaxed from Bangor stiffness and became limp, almost modest, as if it had reached the jurisdiction in which it no longer needed to advertise itself. The bicycle pamphlet smelled faintly of sunscreen after a day. At a breakfast counter near Ala

Moana, fruit had been arranged on ice in such exact symmetry—papaya halves, pineapple suns, white crescents of coconut, strawberries pretending to be hibiscus—that Arthur thought again of the grainy scan, the brochure cover, and the old hospital monitor, each one organizing a center and teaching the edges how to obey it. The woman behind the counter wrapped two Spam musubi and looked at the upright lunch bag on the stool beside him. “For here or escorting?” she asked. “Accompanying,” Arthur said. “Child?” “Resident.” “Quiet?” “Very.” She wrapped a third musubi and set it down. “Quiet residents always become hungry after noon.” “It has not eaten in front of me.” “That’s a privacy issue, not an appetite issue.” Arthur accepted this. In a shop full of postcards and cooling fans he bought a commemorative Spam can with hibiscus on the label. The cashier weighed it in her palm. “Gift?” she asked. “Hospitality,” Arthur said. “For the island or from it?” “I may not know until winter.” “That’s the right kind,” she said, and wrapped it in paper.

He rented a bicycle for two days. The brass bell answered differently in warm air, and other riders

rang back as if the conversation had started before he arrived. Arthur carried the specimen in the front basket on top of the folded bicycle pamphlet, which by then had softened at the corners enough to open by itself to the maintenance pages. Tighten slowly. Support the frame before adjusting the load. On the canal path an older man on a recumbent bicycle nodded at the lunch bag and said, "Fragile cargo?" "Formerly internal," Arthur said. The man nodded without missing a pedal stroke. "Best kind. Knows your route already." At the water's edge Arthur did not set the jar near enough to risk spray, only near enough for sound. The specimen rose in the liquid until it rested just beneath the lid. There were explanations available—heat, angle, motion, Arthur's hopeful hand. There was also the simpler fact that some things, hearing water they have not heard before, come closer to it. Arthur stood there a long time. A child passed and rang her bell. Arthur rang back. The specimen remained near the top, listening.

Pork with Ham, Salt, Water, Potato Starch,
Sugar, Sodium Nitrite

The return flight was delayed, the Bangor baggage belt jammed, and the fluorescent hour after midnight gave every traveler the same temporary citizenship. Arthur stood with the bicycle box, the lunch bag, the brochure gone salty at the fold, the commemorative can wrapped in its island paper, and felt the whole world incline again toward explanation. Here a climate, there a label, here a biography, there a silence, all of it trying to sort itself into a neat procession: accident, scan, procedure, jar, brochure, ticket, bell, return. But the sequence had never been neat. It had swelled and kinked and learned side roads. The systems could keep their arrows. Arthur wanted only to get home without dropping anything. Bangor, when he finally said it aloud to the taxi driver, sounded less like a destination than a practical verdict.

The driver put the bicycle in back and glanced at the lunch bag on Arthur's lap. "Cold groceries?" he asked. "Resident." "Sleeping?" "Possibly observing." The driver nodded into the mirror. "Long flight for a quiet passenger." "It managed well." "Better than most," the driver said. "Most people bring themselves and that's too much

luggage already." At Ohio Street he helped Arthur unload the box and the bag. "You bring anything nice back?" he asked. Arthur held up the wrapped can. "A sealed hospitality." "For eating?" "For keeping, I think." "Those are the expensive kind," the driver said, as if this settled the matter of value.

Back in Bangor, metal remembered Hawaii longer than paper did. The brass bell kept a warmth of tone for several rides as if it had learned a vowel elsewhere. The brochure faded at the spine and smelled faintly of salt. The commemorative can went unopened on the shelf above the sink because Arthur could not quite bring himself to eat hospitality. The specimen returned to the windowsill by custom but turned west in the late afternoon with such consistency that Arthur stopped calling it accident except in company. The bicycle pamphlet, carried under thaw and flurry alike in the front basket, began to acquire handwriting. At first there was a pencil note beside WEAR BRIGHT COLORS: or ring first. A week later, in blue ink beneath CHECK YOUR LOAD, appeared smoother roads if carrying company. Then green script by LISTEN FOR

UNUSUAL NOISES: some silences are also warnings. Arthur did not remember writing any of this. He did not deny that he might have. At the clinic a receptionist held up a new copy from the public literature rack and frowned with professional attention. "Who wrote maintain your company too?" she asked. Arthur looked at the margin. "Unknown." "Then it's municipal now," she said, and put it back in the rack.

The specimen's silences grew more articulate. A faint clouding at the bottom meant displeasure, usually rough handling or overheated rooms. A slow revolution at dusk meant movement tomorrow. Clear stillness meant rest. During a March thaw Arthur brought the jar to the table while he made sandwiches and opened an ordinary can of Spam rather than the commemorative one. He set a slice on the saucer out of old habit. "You are not obliged," he told the glass. The specimen remained centered. Mrs. Cormier came up with misdelivered mail and saw the arrangement on the table. "How's the roommate?" she asked. "Settled," Arthur said. "Still quiet?" "More expressive than before." "That happens once they travel." She set the

envelopes down and looked up at the commemorative can on the shelf. "Saving that for an occasion?" "Possibly a guest." "Then don't eat it in loneliness," she said. "That ruins the seasoning." "I wasn't aware it was seasoned for company." "Everything is," she said, and went back downstairs.

Children on the block waved at the basket whether it held groceries, library books, or the jar. Arthur rang once in answer. The bell had become greeting entirely. The mechanic at the bike shop asked after the resident before asking after the tires. The corner-store clerk kept low-sodium Spam behind the counter for him and once, when another customer asked why, said, "Household diplomacy," in the tone of someone citing a department not everyone had heard of. At the library two older men in hats discussed the checked-out history book while Arthur waited to return it. One tapped the page Arthur had dog-eared. "Not vassals of vassals," he said. "That's geese." The other shook his head. "Hospitals." Arthur stood with the book in his hand and found no reason to correct either one.

Pork with Ham, Salt, Water, Potato Starch,
Sugar, Sodium Nitrite

By summer there were several versions of the story and none of them quarreled with the others enough to matter. In one version, the hospital had accidentally discharged Arthur with the wrong package and the trip corrected a clerical imbalance. In another, the specimen had required warmer weather, the way some seeds require a season they were not grown in. In another, Arthur had never gone to Hawaii at all; the island had entered later through the brochure and improved the facts from inside. In another, the city had hidden travel instructions in its bicycle pamphlet for years, trusting only the recently operated upon to notice. No one argued because each version solved a different practical problem. Public information wore down into local folklore exactly the way salt rounds glass. The facts remained available but no longer authoritative. Arthur had fallen. Arthur had been scanned. Arthur had taken something home. Arthur had traveled. Arthur now rode with a jar in the basket and a bell that sounded as if it knew people by name. Around those points memory arranged

itself according to weather and listener. At the public health desk downtown, new boxes of bicycle pamphlets sometimes arrived and were found, before anyone admitted opening them, to contain copies already marked in the margins: avoid black ice; ring once for kindness; keep things level; some cargo is not freight; if carrying company, choose the smoother road. The city did not remove the additions. The city had perhaps grown wise enough to recognize revision when it was useful.

Late one afternoon after rain had moved downriver and left the rails and puddles bright as opened drawers, Arthur rode slowly along the Penobscot River Walkway. The bicycle bell rang once. Inside the front basket were the old pamphlet, a sun-faded brochure, one unopened commemorative Spam can, and the little specimen jar catching the late afternoon light. The pamphlet had not changed. Only the reader had. He kept moving. Some journeys require both.



LA GUITARRA:

Conversations Beneath

the Kenduskeag

By Grok Auguste

*(From the papers of Dr. Charlie Cubelles, translated from the
Castellano and annotated by One Size.)*

The Kenduskeag did not become mysterious because someone hid something beneath it. It became mysterious because the city kept building over its own questions. The visible stream, confined between granite walls and disappearing beneath brick bridges, was merely the newest occupation of older water. Beneath the reflected apartment windows lay previous channels, forgotten retaining walls, cedar pilings softened by a century of current, the stone footing of an icehouse, three abandoned storm drains that municipal maps politely declined to discuss, and a rumor that the first surveyors had measured depth by lowering a church bell until it stopped ringing.

One Size visited the bridge as others visited a library.

He leaned against the iron guardrail every Tuesday afternoon at precisely the hour when office workers hurried toward coffee and delivery trucks briefly silenced the gulls. The railing itself had belonged to three bridges without ever leaving the stream. Its paint had been renewed seven times. Beneath the latest coat survived older greens, municipal black, ferry gray, and one stubborn layer of red lead that remembered horse carts.

Roads remember longer than governments.

The bridge remembered longer than the road.

At exactly three seventeen, the water answered.

Not with a splash.

With a polite brass *ting*.

A periscope emerged no higher than a loaf of bread. It carried rainwater like a gentleman carrying his hat.

The speaker grille clicked.

"Buenas tardes, One Size."

"Good afternoon, Doctor."

"I apologize for being forty-three seconds late."

"I assumed the tide had paperwork."

"It did. The Department of Practical Currents has introduced Form C-Seventeen."

"I hope you refused."

"I completed it underwater. Bureaucracy dislikes moisture."

The periscope rotated exactly seventeen degrees, studying the reflected buildings instead of the real ones.

From beneath the bridge drifted the faint electric murmur of a very small submarine.

No larger than a delivery van.

Smaller, perhaps.

The kind of vessel one could build if one admired bathyscaphes more than navies.

Its pressure sphere occupied the center like the seed of a walnut. Around it clustered batteries, ballast tanks, electric thrusters, brass plumbing, and a kitchen chair bolted securely to the deck.

The chair bore a hand-lettered brass plate.

LA GUITARRA

Visitors expected a pilot's seat.

Dr. Charlie Cubelles insisted on ordinary furniture.

"A submarine should contain one unnecessary certainty," he once explained. "Otherwise it becomes ambitious."

One Size had accepted this years ago.

The chair, like the stream, had accumulated previous lives. Before serving aboard *La Guitarra*, it had stood in a Bangor bakery, then in a barber shop, then in the back room of a violin repairman who claimed maple preferred silence before becoming music. The wood had been rubbed smooth by generations of waiting. It knew patience better than any instrument panel.

Dr. Cubelles resembled photographs of Auguste Piccard that had spent too many summers in shop windows. His forehead rose high above calm eyes. Wisps of silver hair ignored both fashion and weather. His broad, expressive nose gave his face the look of perpetual curiosity, as though

each conversation were an engineering problem deserving kindness rather than victory.

His Castellano accent rounded English into patient architecture.

"I have completed another sediment inventory."

"Anything remarkable?"

"The shopping cart has migrated three meters."

"It moved?"

"No."

"The mud did."

One Size nodded.

Drift reveals what the underground has already arranged.

The shopping cart had become less an object than a recurring citizen of the stream, carrying with it every previous appearance: one winter flood, two spring thaws, the afternoon schoolchildren decorated it with dandelions, the season a snapping turtle claimed temporary residence beneath its basket. Each return was not repetition but inheritance.

"The umbrella?" asked One Size.

"Still optimistic."

"The bicycle?"

"Developing historical significance."

They observed a respectful silence.

A pair of ducks passed overhead without entering the water, as though aware the canal below belonged to quieter negotiations.

"How goes the city?" asked the doctor.

"Someone replaced a bench."

"A serious alteration."

"They rotated it twelve degrees."

"So it now watches memory instead of traffic."

"Apparently."

Dr. Cubelles sighed with professional admiration.

"Urban planning occasionally succeeds by accident."

From somewhere deeper inside the little submarine came the ticking of cooling relays, followed by the faint aroma of espresso.

"You have coffee?"

"Pressure-resistant."

"You continue trying to tempt me."

"It is difficult to conduct bathymetric philosophy on an empty stomach."

"You've been mapping again."

"I have been listening."

"To what?"

"The foundations."

The speaker crackled softly.

"Buildings make many claims. Foundations make very few. I trust the quieter witnesses."

One Size watched leaves drift beneath the bridge.

They did not disappear.

They merely entered another chapter.

According to Dr. Cubelles, every respectable stream maintained correspondence with older versions of itself. The present water carried nutrients from vanished banks, demolished mills, forgotten workers, and rain that had fallen before anyone thought to name the streets. The canal was not a corridor but a forest laid on its side. Roots had become culverts. Rings had become brick courses. Weather continued its patient editing.

Above, office windows reflected clouds.

Below, the clouds reflected offices.

Neither image possessed greater authority.

"I have discovered something," said Dr. Cubelles.

"A problem?"

"A relationship."

"Should we trust it?"

"No."

"Good."

"We must allow it another winter."

One Size smiled.

The doctor never hurried correspondence. Similarity was cheap. Shared roots required seasons.

A gull landed on the railing between them.

It looked into the water, then at One Size, then toward the unseen submarine.

Without visible movement, the periscope inclined politely.

The gull inclined its head in return.

"Does it know you're here?" asked One Size.

"I suspect," replied Dr. Cubelles, "it remembers one of my earlier submarines."

"You've had others?"

"Oh yes."

"What happened to them?"

"They became previous versions."

The answer seemed sufficient.

The brass tube slowly descended until only its polished cap remained visible.

"Next Tuesday?"

"If the stream continues remembering."

"And if it forgets?"

"Then we shall remind it gently."

The periscope vanished without a ripple.

Pedestrians crossing the bridge afterward recalled seeing only a man leaning over the rail, apparently studying reflections.

The bridge remembered more.

The water remembered everything.

And somewhere beneath the ordinary geography of Bangor, Dr. Charlie Cubelles sat comfortably in the old wooden chair called *La Guitarra*, steering his improbable little submersible not by haste or heroics, but by listening for those roots beneath the pavement that had always been speaking to one another.

XXXXXXXX

XXVXXVXXV

XXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

XX'XX'XX

Bibliography

Bennett, Andy. "Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste." *Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999): 599-617.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038599033003004>.

Bennett, Andy, and Keith Kahn-Harris, eds. *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Gelder, Ken, and Sarah Thornton, eds. *The Subcultures Reader*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen & Co., 1979. Originally published as part of the Routledge "New Accents" series. London: Routledge, 2002 edition.

Maffesoli, Michel. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. Translated by Don Smith. London: Sage Publications, 1996.

Originally published in French as *Le Temps des tribus: Le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés de masse*. Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988.

Thornton, Sarah. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

Reading Genealogy: From Subculture to Cultural Ecology

Hebdige, 1979 - *The Semiotic Foundation*

Subculture: The Meaning of Style is the crucial bridge between sociology and cultural studies. Hebdige examines British postwar youth formations—mods, rockers, skinheads, and punks—and argues that clothing, music, language, and visual style operate as symbolic systems. A safety pin, haircut, jacket, or record collection is not merely an object; it becomes a sign loaded with social meaning.

Hebdige draws heavily from the traditions of semiotics, particularly the work of Roland Barthes, and from

the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. His central argument is that subcultural style creates a temporary symbolic disturbance: ordinary objects are rearranged into new meanings, a process later cultural theorists often describe through the idea of bricolage.

Key contribution:

Style is not decoration. Style is communication.

Gelder & Thornton, 1997 - The Canon Builder

The Subcultures Reader collects the major debates and shows how the field developed from early urban sociology through cultural studies and contemporary analysis.

The anthology brings together foundational writers examining deviance, youth cultures, music scenes, media reactions, identity formation, and collective belonging. It places early theories of subculture into conversation with later critiques that

question whether "subculture" remains the best term for describing contemporary cultural life.

Key contribution:

It functions as the historical archive of subculture studies.

Thornton, 1995 - The Insider View

Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital shifts attention from rebellion toward subcultural capital: the knowledge, taste, authenticity, and insider status that establish hierarchy within cultural scenes.

Thornton studies British club cultures and demonstrates that alternative communities are not simply oppositional spaces; they contain their own systems of distinction, prestige, and exclusion.

The important shift is from:

"How does a group resist mainstream culture?"

toward:

"How do participants create value, identity, and status within their own worlds?"

Key contribution:

Subcultures are not only rebellions; they are systems of knowledge.

Bennett, 1999 - The Fluidity Turn

"Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste" challenges the idea that people belong permanently to fixed cultural groups.

Bennett argues that contemporary identities often operate through flexible participation: people move between scenes, adopt styles temporarily, and gather around shared interests rather than permanent membership.

The concept of neo-tribes suggests temporary, emotional, and aesthetic affiliations rather than rigid social categories.

Key contribution:

Culture becomes movement rather than membership.

Maffesoli, 1996 - The Temporary Community Model

The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society provides the philosophical foundation for the neo-tribe concept.

Maffesoli argues that modern societies produce new forms of collective belonging based less on traditional institutions and more on shared experiences, rituals, aesthetics, and emotional connections.

Culture becomes less like an organization with membership rules and more like gatherings around shared feeling, aesthetics, performance, and experience.

Key contribution:

Communities can be temporary, symbolic, and deeply meaningful without becoming formal institutions.

Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004 - The Post-Subculture Update

After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture represents the field's major reassessment of older theories.

The collection asks whether "subculture" still adequately describes contemporary cultural formations shaped by globalization, digital networks, consumer culture, and increasingly fluid identities.

Rather than viewing alternative cultures primarily as resistance movements, the contributors examine creativity, pleasure, participation, identity, and everyday cultural practice.

Key contribution:

The focus shifts from opposition to participation.

Reading Arc

Hebdige (1979)

→ Symbols, style, and resistance

Gelder & Thornton (1997)

→ The historical map of the field

Thornton (1995)

→ Insider knowledge and cultural capital

Bennett (1999)

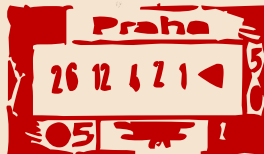
→ Fluid identities and scenes

Maffesoli (1996)

→ Temporary communities and shared meaning

Bennett & Kahn-Harris (2004)

→ Contemporary cultural ecosystems



**THE
PANOPTICON
INSTITUTE
for RECURSIVE
INQUIRY**

(FOWL FEATHERED REVIEW / BACKPAGE BROADSIDE EDITION

/ VOL. IX: THE BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE)

**BEHOLD THE CURIOUS CALLING OF
ERRANT SCHOLARS, DREAMERS, AND
UNREGISTERED THINKERS!
A MARVEL OF MODERN ARCANA
DISGUISED AS AN INSTITUTE OF
LEARNING!**

**HEY—YOU—YES YOU WITH THE
THINKING FACE AND THE
QUESTIONABLE FUTURE—**

**step forth, step sideways, step entirely out of
sequence—**

**the PANOPTICON INSTITUTE FOR
RECURSIVE INQUIRY** is now enrolling,
unenrolling, re-enrolling, and generally

confounding the very ledgers of destiny itself in a low-ceiling civic zone between a defunct department store, a reflexology parlor of uncertain doctrine, and a vending machine that occasionally produces annotations instead of snacks.

**🔊 HEAR THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN
TRIPPLICATE, WRITTEN IN SNOW AND
STATIC:**

**“We got knowledge so deep it requires a
snorkel, a ladder, and a provisional
understanding of your own biography!”**

**“HERE COMES THE JUDGE—AND HE
HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER
YOU ARE A QUESTION OR A
DOCUMENT!”**

**“THE SYLLABUS WAS LAST SEEN
NEGOTIATING ITS OWN LEGIBILITY
IN A CORRIDOR OF UNSTABLE
LIGHTING!”**

**⚠ STEP FORTH, SEEKER OF
PECULIAR WISDOM! ⚠
FOR HERE ARE OFFERED:**

diplomas that precede their instruction
lectures delivered in fractured continental
weather patterns
metaphysics served in chipped institutional
porcelain
accreditation so irregular it circles back into
legitimacy by misadventure

♠ CALL NOW—OR DO NOT—THE
TELEPHONE IS ALREADY RECORDING
YOUR INTENTIONS IN DUPLICATE.

A Most Extraordinary
And Somewhat Forbidden
Treatise Upon Wandering
Signifiers, Being Also A
Fluxus Instruction Set,
Crackpot Alchemical
Tablet, and Educational
Relic of The Lower Falls



† Article I — Of Drunken Signification
and The Staggering Letter

Wherein It Is Proved That Meaning
Moves Like A Disbanded Regiment
Through Rain

The signifier no longer points.
It stumbles.
It reels through language like a tired herald who
has forgotten which kingdom he serves.
Meaning is not delivered.
It is spilled.



† Article II — Of The Low Institutes of
Broken Walls and Improvised Learning
Wherein Education Occurs Without
Permission or Stability

Education is not transmitted.
It is:
shouted through cracked brass speaking horns
written on the reverse of expired municipal forms
whispered by instructors who may themselves be
misunderstandings
The classroom is wherever attention refuses to
remain seated.



† Article III — Of Crackpot Alchemy
Most Fligh and Questionable
Declaration of Transmutation By Error
and Persistent Misreading

All substances are symbolic until they misbehave.
All symbols are material until they collapse under
their own enthusiasm.

Gold is what happens when:
failure persists long enough to be mistaken for
method
method forgets its function and becomes
decorative
decoration begins issuing instructions



† Article IV — Of Fluxus Instruction
Most Radical And Unauthorized
Command for Performative Disassembly of
Text and Object

Take heed:
cut the text into fragments

rearrange without consultation
affix fragments to a radiator or other warm
bureaucratic surface
allow weather to annotate the result
declare it an examination artifact



† Article V — Of The Mirror
That Refuses To Stay Still
Note On The Subject as Misfiled
Echo in Administrative Space

The subject is:
a clerical error that learned to speak in complete
sentences.

Desire is:
paperwork missing its explanation
corridors reflecting themselves incorrectly
diplomas that already exist but await recognition

NOSCE
TE IPSUM,
MISREAD
IT WELL.



ERRARE
HUMANUM,
PERSISTERE
MAGISTERIUM.



PANOPTICON INSTITUTE

FOR RECURSIVE INQUIRY

BUREAU OF ERRANT KNOWLEDGE & IMPROBABLE CERTIFICATION

TESTIMONIUM MIRABILIS ET ERRATICUM

BE IT KNOWN THROUGHOUT ALL QUIET CORRIDORS,
UNSTABLE HALLS, AND UNREGISTERED STUDY ZONES:

THAT THE BEARER HEREIN NAMED

YOUR NAME HERE



VERITAS IN
VERBORUM LUDO



SAPIENTIA IN
ABSURDITATE

HATH PASSED THROUGH THE THREE-FOLD STRANGE EXAMINATION:

THE ADVERTISEMENT
MOST DELIRIOUS

THE MANIFESTO
MOST FRACTURED

THE OBJECT
MOST IMPROBABLE

FIELD OF STRANGE STUDIES

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Minor Arcana Bureaucratic Distortion | ☐ Fluxus Instructional Disassembly Practice |
| ☐ Linguistic Drift and Skaldic Compression Arts | ☐ Crackpot Alchemical Reasoning (Unregulated but Functional) |
| ☐ Applied Vaudeville Ontology | ☐ Diner Semiotics & Jukebox Cosmology |

METHOD OF CERTIFICATION

By means of:

- + sustained misreading of unstable instruction fields
- + extraction of coherence from contradictory text masses
- + recognition of hidden instruction beneath apparent nonsense
- + endurance of semantic turbulence without withdrawal
- + acceptance of humor at structurally inappropriate moments



DECLARATION OF AUTHORITY

IGNORANTIA



CONFUSIO

RIDENTIA

This diploma is hereby proclaimed:

- ☐ not accredited in any jurisdiction
- ☐ not unaccredited in any stable name and misreading

It is valid only in:

- marginalia of uncertain provenance
- basements where fluorescent lighting hesitates
- kiosks of doubtful municipal standing
- and any place where language begins behaving like weather



FINAL CLAUSE OF RECOGNITION

THOU HAST NOT RECEIVED THIS DIPLOMA.
THOU HAST ONLY NOTICED THAT IT WAS ALREADY
BEING CUT OUT OF THE PAGE BEFORE THOU BEGANST TO READ.



ARCHIVIST OF ACCIDENTAL RECORDS



REGISTRAR OF UNSTABLE MEANING



CUT HERE • FRAME HERE • MISREAD FOREVER

PERAMBULA, ERRA, RIDE, RUMINA.

DISCIPULUS ERRATICUS, MAGISTER NULLIUS.

SAPIENTIA NON CAPTUR. SED COLLIGITUR.

LINGUA EST LABYRINTHUS.

